

IGNORANCE UNVEILED

PEARL ULILLA DAVIS



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PEARL ULILLA DAVIS.

Ignorance Unveiled

(Written at the age of 18)

BY

PEARL ULILLA DAVIS

AUTHOR OF

"THE WHISPERED WORDS"

(Written at the age of 16)



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HOPE.

God's hand was guiding mine full well I know,
His Presence near I felt, beneath the glow
Of hopeful messages down sent to throw
A light on ignorant souls so they will *Know*.
And all who read, may weak souls find the right
While looking up to Christ, and see the Light!
—*The Author.*

PREFACE.

Night after night I have lain awake, battling with the restless longing to unburden the expressions that came to me. Voices seemed to soar aloft, urging me on, on, until I found no rest. Mystic forces seemed to gather in my mind and to chain me to a Purpose, which would not leave me. I fought hard to suppress the beckoning, but a Mighty Hand seemed to clutch my knowledge faculties into utterance; words and voices thrilled my heart and mind until I was powerless to resist: I was bound to the Cross, and I had to open my soul. And even as I wrote, those mystic voices grew louder, and one, clear toned and sweet, whispered to me:

“A Mighty Hand is guiding thee. Write on, thou faithful one, thy works shall live in human hearts forever! Souls shall be lifted to God by thy unveiling!”

THE AUTHOR.

Chapter I.

Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

Chapter II.

Enter ye in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go thereat.

Chapter III.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

Chapter IV.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

Chapter V.

For whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted.

Chapter VI.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake!

Chapter VII.

The poor and the merciful will be greatest in Heaven; and the least in Heaven will be the rich and pitiless.

Chapter VIII.

Trust God; look upward, and open your soul to Him. Seek His aid and all will be well.

Chapter IX.

In life, we may learn to forget our badness, but in Death, it rises like a mountain before us, and the more we try to get from it, the greater it grows, until it covers us!

Chapter X.

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of Heaven.

IGNORANCE UNVEILED.

CHAPTER I.

Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known.

* * *

He was the only son of one of the richest merchants of Hannibal, accustomed to all the luxuries and refinements of wealth; while his daily associates were of the leading families of Hannibal, St. Louis, and other large cities of Virginia. She worked as clerk and bookkeeper in his father's office, thereby maintaining a livelihood for her mother, her crippled brother and herself.

It was nearly seven o'clock, and only a faint radiance in the western sky gave proof that the sun had disappeared but a short time ago. Nearly all the stores were closed, and people were hurrying homeward, passing these two as they loitered along the street. Eugene Davert had met her at the office door, and had not yet left her side. He had taken in every detail of her sweet, patient face, her shapely form, which the cheapest of dress material could never make awkward. Five months he had been absent from Hannibal, and yet she had given no signs of pleasure at his return. She had greeted him with her usual quiet dignity, and he felt both vexed and puzzled. In her graceful, girlish way, she walked by his side, but scarcely a

word had she spoken, excepting to give polite answers to his many questions.

"Ah!" he said, suddenly. "I had not noticed it before. Your friend, Ethel Flait, is absent from the store. How is that? Did my father discharge her?"

He saw a quick emotion pass across her thoughtful face.

"No," answered Lila Landon, as though something were choking her, "just after your departure, Ethel eloped with Lester Brown!"

"Lila! impossible! Why, Brown is a thorough scamp!"

She raised her deep blue eyes to his face.

"There are many scoundrels in this world, Mr. Davert," she said, quietly.

He did not know why, but a strange thrill passed over him.

"What has Ethel's mother said about it?" he asked, his gaze wandering from hers. "Mrs. Trenton is a proud woman. This elopement surely aroused her indignation?"

"Which is only natural, Mr. Davert. But she was powerless to avert the disaster. So well had the elopement been planned, that no one knows of their whereabouts."

"What in the world prompted Ethel to do such a thing? She always seemed a lady-like girl. But she has not been so happy since her mother's divorce, has she?"

Rising tears glistened in the young girl's eyes.

"The divorce was pain enough for Ethel," she replied, "but when her mother married Mr. Tren-

ton so soon afterwards, it nearly broke Ethel's heart. 'If mamma can do such a thing,' she said one day to me, 'nothing is disgraceful. Think of my father living and my mother married to another man.' Poor Ethel, poor, dear girl. Her pride seemed to vanish after that, and she grew so pitifully reckless, that I cried whenever I thought of her. She even"—with a faltering voice—"slighted me, and when I reproved her, she said that she wasn't a fit companion for me."

"But, Lila, did she love this Brown?"

"I—I think that she did,—that she *does* love him."

Eugene Davert drew a deep breath.

"Ah, that accounts for it, then. Love! what won't people do for love?"

They had reached the street corner bordering a vacant lot, and no one was near them. There was a large locust-tree just at the corner, but they did not see the manly form leaning lightly against it. He was at the other side of the tree, looking dreamily along the street, unconscious of the pedestrians' approach.

Eugene stopped and placed his slender, gloved hand over her wrist.

"Lila, if it was love that prompted them to act, then all is well. What is honor if there is love? What is dishonor if there is devotion?"

He was gazing into her eyes, and catching a glimpse of the passion that lurked in his, she shrank perceptibly away.

"Lila, have you ever loved,—ever thought of loving?"

He had moved so near that her shoulder brushed his arm. A faint flush tinged her rounded cheeks. With a nervous hand, she pushed back a stray ringlet that had fallen over her brow.

"Yes, I sometimes think of it," she answered, slowly.

He glanced cautiously about. There were people further down on the opposite walk, but they were not approaching. He bent his handsome face toward her.

"Lila, you know how wealthy my father is, do you not? He would never leave me his worldly possessions, were I to marry beneath me. But, darling, I love you so that it drives me mad to be without you. Lila, will you not make me happy, even though this obstacle stands in my way? Could you not be happy with me? I would give you every luxury that wealth can afford, and I would treat your mother and your brother as though they were my own."

A startled light of fear crept into her eyes, but, as though held by that light touch upon her wrist, she stood with quickened breath before him.

"You mean that——"

Her eyes were raised now, and gazing straight into his own.

"Of course I could not marry you, Lila, until I was sure of my inheritance; that would be impossible. But, darling, I would be a devoted slave to you,—your husband excepting in name. Dearest, why won't you say yes? Do you doubt my love?"

"Doubt your love?" As she spoke a faint smile parted her lips. "No, I wasn't even thinking of

that. I was only trying to realize what wealth would mean to my toiling, care-worn mother, and my crippled brother who pines for luxuries that we can never afford."

A triumphant look crossed his face.

"Your brother likes me, too," he said, gently. "And think of what we could do for him."

"But—but are you quite sure, Mr. Davert, that it is right for any girl to do what you are asking me?"

"Right? Why, Lila, what a question!" He laughed mirthlessly. "Dozens of girls do it every day. It is——" He stopped abruptly, as a sudden fear crept into his heart. What was that strange, intense look in her eyes? "You will come, Lila?" he pleaded. "You will make me happy?"

"I must have time to think," she answered, softly. "You will not mind waiting a little while, will you?"

"No, my darling, but do not make it too long. Promise that you will answer me to-morrow."

"Yes, I will answer you to-morrow." She drew her hand from his clasp and moved away. "And now I will bid you good-evening. It is getting dark; mamma will be looking for me."

With her quiet dignity, she gave him to understand that the remainder of her homeward route would be more desirable without him. He raised his hat and bowed with all the grace of a Southerner.

"Remember!" he murmured, tenderly, "and be merciful, Lila!"

She smiled into his eyes, and then, turning, walked away.

He stood gazing after her, a slight flush on his face.

"What your thoughts are, Eugene, only God knows!"

It was a grave, pained voice that uttered these words. The man had come from the other side of the locust-tree and was now standing before his friend.

Nearly every person in Hannibal knew, or had heard of, this man. He was loved and blessed in the homes of the poor; brothers, who had fallen by the wayside, owed their converted souls to him. He was known as a prophet, a preacher, a man whose whole soul was wrapped in the purest faith of Christ. He was not what one would call a handsome man; no, but, rather, his face was beautiful with the knowledge and practice and love of Christianity. Hundreds of people spoke of him with love and reverence; others doubted his religious ardor, and tried, in every way, to arouse disbelief in him. But what he was, he was, and no living soul could make him otherwise.

Not receiving a reply to his remark, he placed one firm hand on Davert's shoulder and repeated:

"What your thoughts are, Eugene, only God knows!"

With a vexed frown, Eugene looked into his friend's eyes.

"You here?" he asked, angrily. "Where have you been hiding all this time?"

"I was leaning against that tree; had you given

but one glance in that direction, you would have seen me. My friend, what I have overheard has pained me very deeply. Do you realize, I wonder, how rapidly your sin is yoking you to dishonor?"

"What do you mean?" Davert spoke fiercely, his lips compressing as he looked into the face of Lauren Void, where pity, love and anxiety were all so plainly revealed.

"Eugene, you are breaking one of God's holy commandments."

"Which one?"

"The seventh."

A suppressed oath faltered on Davert's lips.

"You lie, sir. I have not ruined the girl."

"I know that." His voice was full of pain.

"But, nevertheless, you are sinning!"

"I tell you"—angrily—"I have not touched the girl!"

"I believe you; but you have read the Bible, haven't you?"

"Of course. I used to think quite seriously of it."

"So you are like the seed among the thorns, Eugene; you tried to live in the belief of God, but the deceitfulness of riches choked your belief and you have become unfruitful."

"Never mind what I have become. What has that to do with my breaking a commandment?"

Lauren's voice was very low and serious, as he spoke.

"Well, my friend, you know Jesus said this: 'But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a

woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.' ”

The young man's face flushed with angry pride. He had half turned away, but now he clenched his hands and wheeled about, facing his interpreter.

“You ought to be ashamed to speak such words! It is a pretty plain truth to utter on the street.”

“Then you admit it to be the truth?”

“Your shameless impudence compels me to do so!”

“And your words, my falling friend, compel me to say that I am not ashamed to utter words that Jesus Christ preached to multitudes!” Then, softly, lingeringly, he raised the young man's hands in both his own.

“My brother, is there not more shame in being guilty of the crime than in speaking it to save another?”

Eugene snatched his white, jeweled hands away.

“Pshaw! don't try your silk voice around me. I'm not the weak kind, to believe everything you say. If you want the girl for yourself, say so; don't beat about the bush like a coward!”

There was a moment's hush. Davert moved uneasily.

A smile of patient endurance crossed Lauren Void's lips.

“Your words are quite meaningless, Eugene, when I have met Miss Landon but twice in my life,—and then only recently, for I became acquainted with her just one week ago.”

“Well, love can grow in a week!”—sneeringly.

"And passion even sooner—I know that, Eugene."

"See here, Lauren, you are insulting me."

"No, my friend, believe me, I am not. I am pleading with you for the honor of an innocent girl. Why didn't you answer her as a true man should, when she asked you if it was right of her to do what you were asking? It may be nothing to you on earth in wrecking a girl's soul, but it will mean vengeance on you in heaven! Revel in bliss while you may, but there is a judgment ever before you. No matter where stray the Shepherd's sheep, He knows where to seek them. No matter how small your sins, He knows them!"

"But if we are expected to be good, why is there a devil to tempt us?"

"The devil never tempts us, my friend."

"What! You deny it?"

"Ah, yes, yes! Were we never to tempt the devil, he would forsake us! Hell is not created for us; we create hell!"

"Good heavens! I do not understand you!"

"It is very simple. For instance, notice the café across the street from us. Perhaps you have an inclination to go there to drink?"

"I have, I admit."

"Yes, but only a mild inclination. But supposing I turn to you like this." He takes his hand, his eyes eager, a gentle drawing forward of his clasp. "'Come, come to the café with me. There is wine, cool, rich, delicious—come, come!' You would feel more eager, wouldn't you?"

"Ah, yes, indeed, I would go at once."

"Just so. That would be an undeniable inclination of tempting."

"I see; but who would be to blame, you or I?"

"You, of course. I would only be tempting. *You* would be my ruin, for you would encourage me to tempt others. Your downfall would be yourself—one; but my downfall would be the downfall of thousands!"

"And you would not be to blame at all?"

"Yes, it would be wrong in me to encourage you; but *you* would be the tempter."

"By this, you mean——"

"That, according to what I have said, I would stand in the place of the devil; but *you* would be tempting me to tempt."

"Then do you think a saloon-keeper is sinning to sell liquors?"

"Yes, it is wrong of him to encourage, and yet if he does not tempt in words or acts, he is not a tempter. If a person looks at the place and longs for a drink, but passes on, no harm is done. If he does pass in and drink, he is the tempter, for he will be tempted to do so again. That is tempting the devil."

"But do you think it wrong to drink?"

"In a moderate and sensible way, no; for, according to the Bible, Jesus distributed wine to His guests. Only when a man drinks to excess is he a tempter. He is a glutton, then, and as such is a tempter of his own ruin."

"And the saloon-keeper would not be to blame?"

"Only for placing the drinks before the eye."

Unless he should tempt by words or acts, as I have said; then he would also be a tempter, and share the downfall."

"But which would get the greatest blame?"

"The glutton, of course, for he would have the will-power to resist, and in his downfall he tempts his own will-power. Therefore, he is first and greatest in his ruin."

With wondering eyes, Davert gazed into the speaker's face.

"Lauren, how do you know this?"

"By experience, Eugene, for men, whom I have saved from drunkards' graves, have told me that it was pure weakness that was wrecking them, body and soul."

"Well, if that is the truth, then, what did you do to save them?"

"I taught them to place their weaknesses in the hands of Christ, and He is leading them to righteousness."

"Lauren, why do you believe in God?"

"Because I am here."

"But supposing there had never been a God; where would you be?"

"Nowhere, for there would be no world; I should never have been created."

"Your belief is extraordinary. But don't you really think that the rich have more pleasure on this earth than the poor?"

"No, indeed, for there are poor persons, who, in an hour, can succeed in enjoying what will take rich persons years to find."

"Why do you think so?"

"Because a poor man's pleasure is pleasure, but a rich man's pleasure is merely a pastime—a false glitter."

"By Jove, you are right there, Lauren! I've envied many a poor fellow's pleasure at something that ennuied me! Then you do not admire this society of rich people who live solely for their own vanity and pleasures?"

"No; and no true Christian can admire it, my friend."

"But what do you think of it, Lauren?"

"This: Society is a whirlpool of fate, with one whirl toward heaven and ninety-nine whirls toward destruction!"

"Then you think, do you not, that a wealthy man's existence is not a happy one?"

"Yes, for there is not a rich man in this world whose restless longings do not tell him that something is lacking in his daily life. It remains with him to heed this voice of Christ, or to push it from him; but kill it he never shall, for it will plead with him unto death!"

Eugene Davert moved uneasily.

"By Jove, you seem to be reading my soul!"

"Then, Eugene, I wish that I could save it. I beg of you to spare this innocent girl. Oh, my friend, think what Jesus said: 'For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul. For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with the angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works.' Eugene, while there is yet time, commence in making your works admirable ones!"

There was a short silence.

"I love her, I must have her!" muttered Davert, savagely.

Lauren Void heard the mumbled words. His beautiful face paled.

"Beware, my friend," he said, sternly. "If you let hate or passion rule you, your soul will be lost."

Then, with bowed head, he turned and strode away.

Eugene turned his back upon his departing friend, and gazed over into the vacant lot. A pile of débris, which had been dumped there, met his look.

"Good heavens!" he shuddered, "that is like the pile of débris which God will not want. Why in the world have I listened to Lauren's fool-headed chatter? Misery! how his words haunt me! What a face,—what a voice he has! To the devil with him, I say!"

And with a bitter oath, Davert hailed a passing cab; but the vacant lot with that pile of sin, haunted his memory unto his dying day!

CHAPTER II.

Enter ye in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go thereat.

* * *

Lila Landon continued her way homeward, a strange feeling of dissatisfied restlessness creeping into her throbbing heart. Why had he said those words to her: "Think what we could do for your brother!" Poor, sweet-tempered, and patient little Laury. How he always overlooked his own pains and misery, to console his mother or her, with cheery words and little acts of kindness. Poor child! Since his birth, one leg had been shriveled and useless, and his back was always so weak that he could stand only so many minutes at a time. If she was rich, what luxuries she could give him!

In her unselfish thoughts of him, she had not yet clearly realized that the money would be stained in dishonor. Sometimes she was rather slow to think of more than one important event, but when the underknowledges did awaken her to their meanings, she was never slow in making her decision. Had her mother and brother been querulous, discontented persons, she would not have been so sensitive to their comforts; but when they met all troubles with brave, patient faces, and cheered her, even in their trials, her soul quivered with longing to draw them above toil.

As she neared her home, which was a tiny cottage on the southern outskirts of Hannibal, her eyes grew dim with tears. This home was the only possession that her dead father had left them, and she often wondered what they could do without it.

"Even in our troubles we have lots to be thankful for," she murmured.

Then her tears dried away, and, looking up, she saw Laury leaning on his well-worn crutches. He was standing by the gate, and evidently awaiting her. With a gay smile and wave of her hand she hurried forward, and he raised his cap as he assisted her to open the gate.

"Lila, I have been waiting for you, dearest," he murmured, as their lips met, lovingly. "No, no, I can shut the gate. Something has happened to make me very happy and I want to share it with you. Come in where mother is and I will tell you."

With loving tenderness, she looked into his boyish face as they went along the walk. It was a very short path to the little, front porch, and an old chestnut-tree, waving its leafy branches above the roof, was the only tree in the yard. However, there were many flowers thriving and blooming near the porch, and several potted carnations were nodding their scented heads in the sitting-room window. As Lila and Laury entered the room, a gust of wind stirred the lovely flowers, and one sent a shower of petals to the floor.

Strangely nervous, Lila saw this and winced.

"I wonder what that predicts for me," she said,

uneasily. "Is my life to be a waste like that pretty flower?"

"Why, darling," exclaimed her mother, coming toward her, "growing fanciful at this late hour? You are looking through the wrong eye, darling. The flower is showing you that you have learnt to discard sin, and that your soul will ever be fruitful. See, the center of the flower is left; that is the soul."

"Why, mother, you're right, after all!"—with a kiss. "How one can nag at trouble, can't one? Well, well, how nice and cosey it is in here. Is supper almost ready, mother, dear?"

"Yes, darling, all ready, so come right along. You are a little late, aren't you, Lila?"—with an anxious look.

Lila met that motherly glance, and her girlish heart leaped uneasily. How well her mother read her varying moods.

"Yes, mother, a little late," she murmured, softly. Then she assisted Laury to his chair before the kitchen-table.

There were but two bedrooms besides the sitting-room, so they always ate their meals in the cosey little kitchen. "And even if we do have to eat in here," Laury had often said, "I'll bet we enjoy it as much as a king does in his dining-hall."

Mrs. Landon was about forty years of age, but her dark tresses contained scarcely a gray hair, and even though her face was wrinkled, it was still attractive, for the marks of time were from toil, and not from mere sourness of disposition.

She always sat by Laury at the table, and, as they took their places, she turned to him.

"You look a little weary, darling, so don't walk any more to-night. Now, while you eat, tell Lila about your good fortune, and then you must go to bed. You didn't sleep well last night, and I want you to do better this time."

As she spoke, she helped him to a piece of steak.

"Oh, mother," he laughed, "Bob Dayton says that 'Steak for supper-fare is sure to bring the night-mare!' So what am I to do? I confess that I have a very keen appetite for this particular steak."

"Then eat it, darling, and tell me about your happiness. I'm awfully anxious to hear it."

Lila met his gaze and gave him an encouraging nod.

"Well," said he, eagerly cutting a piece of the meat, "you have heard of Maud Lake, haven't you?"

Lila opened her eyes very wide.

"Miss Lake, the heiress?—yes, indeed! But what has she got to do with your good fortune?"

"Everything, Lila. She stopped here to-day, in her carriage, and asked me to make her four dozen of my reed-baskets. She wants them for a candy social, and I am to be paid five cents apiece for them."

Lila looked in astonishment at her mother's smiling face.

"Why, mother! why, Laury!" she exclaimed. "Why, how did she know that you make baskets?"

"Mr. Void told her about it, Lila, and I'm

almost sure he got her to buy them of me. She said that he wants all the others that I can make, for the hospital children in St. Louis."

There were grateful tears in Mrs. Landon's eyes as she watched her son's bright face, and Lila, with a little cry of delight, arose, and going around the table, gave her brother a vigorous hug.

"Oh, my pet, what luck for you! Five cents for every one you make, dear? Why, Mr. Void is a jewel, isn't he? But, darling, you mustn't make more than ten a day; that will be quite enough work for one day, won't it, mother?"

"Yes, Laury, you must not overdo your strength, dear."

"Well, that will be fifty cents a day, anyhow," said Laury, triumphantly.

Lila rubbed her soft cheek against his, and then returned to her chair.

"And you shall have some new picture-books, and everything nice!" she cried. "Oh, how often I have longed to get you a little present! Laury, you know I have, don't you, darling?" Her lips quivered as she looked at him. How contentedly and brightly he was devouring that tough piece of steak. She had scarcely touched her own.

"Know it!" exclaimed Laury, with flushed face. "Of course I do, and that is just the reason I'm going to buy something nice for you and mother as soon as I can save up enough."

"Oh, Laury, you mustn't say that!" interposed Lila, while Mrs. Landon cried:

"No, no, Laury, your earnings must be for your own little pleasures."

"Well, if that's the case, my little pleasures are in doing something for you two," he said, with a gay little laugh. Then, suddenly, his thin face paled, he quietly laid aside his fork and leaned back in his cushioned chair. In an instant his mother was standing by his side.

"Darling, what is it?" she pleaded, with wistful eyes.

He tried to smile, but the effort was a dismal failure.

"I—I am a bit tired," he faltered, lowering his eyes so that she could not see the pain in them. "I think I shall go to bed, please, mother!"

Lila, with a pale, anxious face, helped her mother roll his chair across the sitting-room and into the neat little bedroom. It was not often that he was attacked with those spasm-like pains, and they always frightened her.

"Darling, I will put him to bed," said her mother, "and you may go and clear away the dishes. I will call you when he is ready to bid you good-night."

Lila knew that her mother always read the Bible and talked of Jesus to Laury when he was suffering thus, and it seemed to bring wonderful endurance to the patient child. So she softly closed the door and returned to the kitchen. With as little noise as possible, she went about her household task, her mind fearfully uneasy about Laury.

"Oh, if he should die, it would seem as though our little flock were wrecked forever. If I were only able, I would have every great doctor in the world come here to see him. And yet"—with a

deep, tearful sigh—"I doubt if they could help him. The doctors at the hospital could do nothing for him. They say that it is a deformity impossible to remedy."

A tear rolled down her cheek, but she wiped it hurriedly away.

"He endures it more bravely than I," she sobbed. "I envy him his implicit faith in God. How grand it must be to feel as he and mother do! Why is it that I am different, I wonder?"

She finished drying the plates and placed them beside the cups and saucers in the closet. Then she pushed the table against the wall and emptied her dish-pan.

"There, to-day's work is done," she murmured, as she glanced at the small clock. "Only nine o'clock. Well, I am glad it is getting dark, because Laury will be more apt to fall asleep. Poor, dear brother, poor boy!"

She hung her apron behind the door and then entered the sitting-room, carrying the lamp in her hand. This she placed upon a small table, and then she sank upon the sofa near the window. A few moments passed in silence, while she listened to the murmur of her mother's voice in the next room. Then the voice ceased, soft footsteps traversed the room, the door was opened and closed, and her mother came toward her.

"Is he asleep, mother?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, dear, he fell asleep while I was reading to him about the Crucifixion. 'Mother,' he said, 'Jesus withstood many temptations and suffered a great deal, didn't He?' 'Yes, Laury,' I answered.

‘Well, mother, He knew that heaven was worth it,’ he murmured; and then he went to sleep. He seemed much better, too.”

“Oh, mother, I am so glad! I am sure he suffers dreadfully, but he will never tell us. Was there ever a boy like our darling?”

“No, dear, only those who live with Christ in their heart is like our Laury.”

A faint thrill passed over Lila. She took her mother’s hand and drew the elder woman by her side upon the sofa.

“Mother, I have something to confess to you. Please do not attribute my hesitation as an inclination to accept the offer. You know I always need time to think over anything, and this was a great temptation to me while I thought of Laury’s comforts.”

“Yes, dear.”

“Mother, Eugene Davert returned to Hannibal to-day. He arrived this morning on the *Minnesota*.”

“Yes, darling.”

“He hovered about the office all day, and accompanied me part of the way home this evening.”

“His presence accounts for you being late, Lila?”

“Yes, mother.” Lila’s golden-crested head lowered to her mother’s shoulder. “Mother,” she whispered, suddenly becoming agitated, as the full import of her words dawned upon her, “Mr. Davert honored me with the offer to dishonor me! He told me that he loves me, but cannot marry me; that if I will be his wife in all but name, he will

give you and Laury all the luxuries in life that wealth can afford."

"Yes, dear."

The answer came very quietly, and Lila looked amazed.

"Why, mother, you do not seem at all surprised!"

"Lila, I am not. I have been expecting this. I am more experienced in this world's ways than you are, darling. I have realized that Eugene Davert's devotion to a poor girl like you is never a true devotion. It is a passing fancy,—a passion that is given birth only to die! A black ruin that is added to the pile of sin! And your answer, darling, what did you tell him?"

A hot, burning blush dyed the young girl's cheeks.

"Mother, forgive me, I thought of only one thing then—the money that he offered. I told him that, to-morrow, I would give him his answer."

"And now, Lila, do you realize that, were you to accept his offer, your own act would bar you from the kingdom of Heaven?"

"I do, I do, mother!"

Her mother caught her hands.

"Lila, Jesus said: 'Enter ye in at the straight gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go thereat. Because straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it.' My daughter, in this world, there are twenty to lead you to destruction;

while there is one to lead you to righteousness. Take my hand, child, and let me lead you. I am an only one, but with God's will, I am as strong as those sinful twenty, and I can and *will* lead you, as it is the duty of a mother to lead her child!"

The elder woman's voice faltered with emotion, her weary head was bowed as though in prayer. With one wild sob, Lila fell upon her knees before her mother, and buried her awed young face in the soft, white apron.

"Lead! oh, mother, that I should compel you to use the word. Please, please forgive me! No, no, you need not lead me; I will gladly walk by your side. Oh, mother, do not cry. Your tears are piercing my heart so that I cannot breathe. I did not realize the awful sin, mother. My only thought was to help you—you and brother!"

"I understand, darling," was the low reply, as Mrs. Landon wiped away her tears. "But always remember, Lila, and fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

"Then, mother, I should never enter heaven were I to accept Mr. Davert's offer?"

"No, darling, and the gate would also be barred to Mr. Davert. You would both be breaking the seventh commandment. Such a life, without marriage, is the opening of hell."

Lila buried her face in her mother's lap and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, mother, if I were an ignorant girl, if you had never taught me this, how easily I should have

fallen into the fearful pit. And then,—oh, my God!—I should never have hopes of entering heaven! Mother, mother, you have saved me from this awful darkness. I thank you, I thank you!”

Mrs. Landon gently raised the weeping girl.

“You are tired and nervous, darling. Come, kiss me, dear, and then go to bed. It is only a duty that a mother owes to God, to save her daughter from ruin. Now that you *are* saved, unburden your heart to God and rejoice!”

With a quivering breath, Lila kissed her mother and then went into her bedroom.

Mrs. Landon bowed her weary head upon her hands, her heart throbbing with gratitude and peace. She had saved her child!

“Oh, to think that mothers keep silent and let their daughters and sons sink into ruin. Are they more ashamed to explain the simple commandment, ‘THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY,’ than they are to see their children *break* the commandment? I wonder if parents realize the gulf of darkness that surrounds their children when they do not lift the veil of ignorance from their childish eyes? The hand of Satan is on them who hesitate. They need beware!”

She stirred uneasily, and raised her head.

“Would I hesitate to keep Lila from shame?—never, never! Not if I had to toil like a slave by day and by night. Not if I had to go through fire to do so! Not if I had to die in the attempt. Gladly would I give my old life to save her from

dishonor, and to know that it was I, her *mother*, who had lifted her from the gulf of sin's great darkness. For who else should save her, if not her mother or her father—the creators of her being? It is a duty the parents owe to God; and if they omit this duty, their children's downfall will be their downfall, and *their* children's punishment *their* punishment!"

With a slow, reverent gesture, Mrs. Landon raised the worn Bible from its stand and pressed it to her lips.

"Sacred be this volume," she murmured, "for, through it, we reach God!"

For several moments she sat silent, her head bowed in thought. Then she arose and stole softly into the next room and stood beside Lila's bed.

The young girl's long-lashed eyelids were closed, and her golden hair lay tossed over her pillow, and though she looked lovely and peaceful, there was a weary look on her face.

"Only eighteen," murmured the anxious mother. "Poor darling, she is too young to work so hard. But what can I do to help her? Gladly would I do her share of the work if I could. How I wish her father had lived. He, at least, could have made her burdens lighter!"

The sleeping girl stirred softly, then her eyes opened and she looked dreamily into her mother's face. The next instant she started up on one elbow.

"What is it, mother? Is Laury worse? Do you want me?" she asked, her face paling.

A reassuring hand was placed gently on her shoulder.

"No, dear, there is nothing the matter. I only came to see if you were asleep. I did not mean to awaken you. Darling, I fear you have to work too hard!"

"Now, mother, dear, if you keep on worrying about me like that, I shall stay at home and take in washing by the day. The idea! Do you want me to lie around at home like an overfed aristocrat? Not much!" And Lila smiled mischievously.

"And you are quite contented, darling?"

"Contented as an angel with you and Laury, mother. That is why I love to work, when I know it is for you and Laury. I would find no enjoyment in it, were it for myself alone."

"Your words relieve me, Lila. And, darling, if you do not feel too tired to-morrow when you come home, will you mind taking Laury's baskets around to Miss Lake's? He has some already made and she is anxious to get them."

"Why, yes, mother, I shall enjoy the walk. And that reminds me of Mr. Void, mother. He is a very good man, is he not?"

"Yes, darling, for he is a servant of Christ."

"And, mother, he—he is very much nobler than Eugene Davert, isn't he?"

"Dearest, they are not to be compared with the same breath. One is the humble servant of God; the other is a bigoted slave of sin and riches. Did you meet Mr. Void to-day, Lila?"

"No, mother, I have not seen him since last Tuesday. He does not seem to take an interest in me, if I am one of Hannibal's poor."

"But he has thought of Laury, dear."

"That's so, and he often stops to talk to Laury when he sees him in the yard, doesn't he?"

"Yes, dear." Mrs. Landon moved nervously. "If you do meet him, Lila, invite him to call on us."

"All right, mother, and I should have done so before, but I have met him only twice, and then had time to speak but a few words to him."

Lila yawned sleepily, and Mrs. Landon turned away.

"Your father liked Mr. Void very well," she said, simply. "And now, good-night, darling."

A few moments later Lila was asleep, not dreaming of a light that would yet shed its bright rays over her shadowed soul.

CHAPTER III.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

* * *

A bright, happy light was shining in Lila's eyes as, on the following morning, she entered the large department store of the firm of Davert & Son. The sun seemed brighter, her work was a pleasure to her. In a strange, secret way, she felt as though she had been saved from some terrible darkness, and was lifted once more to a pedestal where she yet had the chance to strive for heaven. Laury had come to the breakfast table in his usual cheerful spirits, and she felt as though she could bear any toil to keep him always without pain. Her heart was filled with gratitude, and her soul was flooded with a peaceful calm.

On this particular morning she was robed in a light summer dress, with a pink ribbon at her throat and one about her waist. She wore a wide-brimmed, pink-wreathed hat, and a sweeter picture than she made would have been hard to find. As she entered the store and turned to speak a cheerful good-morning to the clerk at the silk-counter, she saw that Mable Marks was not there. She

glanced hurriedly along the aisle, and noticed in surprise that all the clerks were gathered in a dismayed group near the office. They were talking and gesticulating excitedly, and some of them were pale and frightened.

Lila, with a dim foreboding at her heart, hastened toward them.

"What is it, girls?" she asked, breathlessly. "What has happened?"

"Oh, Lila, you here!" cried Mable Marks. "Oh, it is terrible! I can scarcely realize it. Jack Biron, one of the clerks in the men's department, committed suicide last night. He shot himself in the head, and was found dead in his bed this morning. Oh, it is terrible, terrible!"

"Jack Biron committed suicide!" exclaimed Lila, her face like death. "Oh, girls! Why, what possessed him to do so? He seemed very happy and contented yesterday when he came to speak with me in the office."

"They say it was debts—gambling, you know," answered a little cash girl, who dearly loved to gossip. "Jack was good on the outside, Miss Landon, but he wasn't so nice inside."

The childish words, though unpolished, were very near the truth, and Lila shuddered as she heard them.

"Well, abuse will do him no good now, dear," she said, gently laying her hand on the little, tumbled head. "Speak kindly of the dead."

"Death is terrible enough when it comes naturally, but to murder one's self—oh, it makes me feel as though the devil were in our midst!" And

wiping the tears from her eyes, Mable Marks walked away behind her counter.

Customers were beginning to arrive, and the manager made his appearance.

"Here, ladies," he said, courteously, "to your places, please. Don't think too much of the occurrence. You will not remember it at all at the end of a week."

He saw that they went to their appointed counters, then he followed Lila as she proceeded to the office. This office was at the back of the store, having a glass front that faced the entrance. Lila's hand was on the knob of the door when she became aware of his presence. She turned to him.

"You wish to speak to me, Mr. Dorn?"

"Yes. If you can, Miss Landon, please keep the girls from talking of this—er—suicide. You see it may damage the trade, and that is not to be thought of. For you know if old Mr. Davert, senior, should hear of it, he would come here and rise Cain. I think we are better situated with the elder employer in St. Louis, don't you?"

"Indeed I do," replied Lila, with genuine feeling; for she had a keen recollection of how Eugene's father stamped around in the store whenever he came there, which was seldom, being, at the greatest, once or twice every six months. So, as Mr. Dorn walked away, Lila went to the nearest counter and kindly told the clerk to check any further talk of Jack Biron.

This clerk was a young and frivolous girl, who disliked Lila very much, and in a cold tone she said:

"I will do what I can, of course, but girls will talk."

And then, as soon as Lila had turned her back, Miss Raynor continued to herself: "Let them talk, what harm can come of it? Just because our employer's son pays a few trifling attentions to Lila, even the manager seems to think that she is of more importance than the rest of us. How I hate here cool, slow way! Hasn't she any passion in her, I wonder? I know that I couldn't live long without losing my temper, but I've never seen her angry yet. Well, I suppose she doesn't show her real nature till she gets home."

After which, this young lady gossiped about the suicide with every person that came into the store, and before noon the aisles were crowded with customers who were curious to know all about the affair. So, in her little piece of **malice**, the envious clerk had doubled the trade of her employer.

Entirely ignorant of this bit of by-play, Lila returned to the office and sat down before her desk. Drawing the books from a shelf near by, she commenced her work, but a certain uneasiness stirred in her heart, and every now and then she gazed about her, as though she expected to see Jack Biron's spirit watching her. She found it only imagination, but the shock had startled her nerves, and she found it a difficult task to settle to her work. As the clock struck the hour of ten, she heard a slight murmur echo through the store, and, glancing up, she saw Eugene Davert coming down the aisle. He bowed to the left and right of him in his careless, condescending way, stopped to

speaking a few words to the manager, said something laughingly to the envious Miss Raynor, and then came toward the office.

As Lila heard his hand on the door-knob she pushed aside her book and leaned back in her chair. Any other girl would have been writing, as though unaware of his approach, but Lila's nature was above these little deceptions.

"Good-morning, Mr. Davert; you are quite early this morning," she said, smilingly. "You remind me of a well-known nursery rhyme, which commences like this: 'A dillar, a dollar, a ten o'clock scholar, What makes you come so soon?'"

He came forward and perched on one corner of her desk, thus getting a good view of her face, while his back hid her from the watching clerks.

"You seem to be in very pleasant spirits," he answered with a heavy sigh, his eyes restlessly traveling over her sweet face. Then he bent above her, compressed eagerness in his voice. "Lila, I can wait no longer. What is my answer? Have you forgotten, dear, that you promised to answer me to-day?"

With her pen-holder she slowly traced a carving on her desk.

"No, I have not, Mr. Davert, and my answer is a decided *no!*" She spoke so coldly that a pained look crept into his eyes, his lips whitened. "I have been told how base were your intentions. Through my ignorance, you sought to ruin me. My mother, Mr. Davert, has taught me better than to accept your offer."

"Your mother, Lila!" His handsome face

flushed. "I wished this to be a secret between us. I did not intend that you should share it with others."

"But it is best to tell it too soon, than to tell it too late, Mr. Davert. Don't you agree with me?" She raised her searching eyes to his face. "To whom should I tell my secrets, if not to my mother? Is it better to sin in ignorance than to be saved by unveiling? I think not!"

His hands were clenched for one moment. By no other sign did he reveal that the disappointment was a keen one. Perhaps he was thinking of that vacant lot, spotted with that pile of débris.

"It is strange," he said, as though with an effort, "that your mother does not send someone around here to horsewhip me. Did you tell her the name of your tempter? You see I am not sparing myself."

"No; and why should you spare yourself? It is Christ's forgiveness that you should seek, Mr. Davert. Mother has no wish to punish you. She is not angry with you; she only pities you!"

He turned his flushed face to hers.

"Pities me?" he exclaimed, dryly. "How kind!"

Lila regarded him with cold politeness.

"Yes, mother pities you, when she knows that you go to church, read the Bible, and yet are so deeply sinful that you dare to break God's holy commandments!"

"Enough, please!"

He arose and moved to the back of her chair.

One trembling hand was placed reverently upon her golden hair.

"Lila, as God knows, I love you. Come what will, I ask you to *marry* me."

Miss Raynor had said that she wondered if Lila possessed any passion. Had she been looking at that moment, her doubts would have been dispelled. With eyes flashing with scorn, Lila slowly arose and faced him, her lips quivering with conquering indignation.

"May God forgive such a love as yours, Eugene Davert!" she said, sternly. "Now that you have been balked in your effort to blacken my soul, you have learnt to respect me. Marry you I could not, after knowing what a heart of treachery and selfishness you possess. But"—her voice softening—"if you remain my friend, I only hope that you will learn to respect the words of the holy Bible. For if you do not respect yourself, no true person will respect you!"

"Thank you!" Now she could see how her answer was torturing him. His face had grown so pale that she felt frightened as she saw it.

She placed one trembling hand on his.

"I am sorry, Mr. Davert, but you realize, do you not, that yours is a just punishment, since you have brought it upon yourself?"

And as he listened to her he thought of Lauren Void's words: "The devil does not tempt us; we tempt the devil." How well he realized that fact, now that it was forced upon him.

He raised Lila's small hand and pressed it to

his bloodless lips; then, with a bow, he turned and strode from the office.

A deep sigh of pity and relief escaped her, as the door closed behind him. In her heart, she was sorry for him; but in her soul, she rejoiced that she had been saved from everlasting darkness. She watched him until he had disappeared in the next department; then she bent over the books upon her desk. The clerks were casting curious glances toward her, but she worked on, only conscious of a mingled pain and pleasure in her heart.

An hour passed away; it was becoming quite warm as the noontime approached. Her head was beginning to ache, and, with a weary gesture, she pushed a stray lock from her temple. As she did so the door opened and someone softly approached her.

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

As the strong, musical voice ceased, Lila, with a new light in her blue eyes, looked up. He was holding out one hand and, with the faith of a trusting child, she placed hers in it.

"Oh, Mr. Void, how your words can brighten anyone! You seem to know just what to say at the right time. I had forgotten that Jesus was sharing my yoke, and I was becoming weary."

"Which is only just, Miss Landon, since you have fulfilled your morning's duty. Weariness

need not be discontent, you know. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven!"

"How well you know the Bible!" she cried, with wistful eyes upraised to his beautiful, soulful face. "How I envy you,—oh, how I envy you!"

"You need not, little one. Just remember that, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Continue your hunger and you will be fed. I find that the more I long to discover, the less I find myself unfilled. Oh, glorious blessing, this belief, this peace with God!"

He spoke this last sentence with one quick, lingering breath, his eyes filled with joy unspeakable.

"And I will yet feel as you do, if I keep on thirsting for righteousness?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes, dear. But never, never pause in your thirst—keep on *forever*."

"I will, I will," she breathed feverishly. Then she drew her hand from his clasp and continued:

"I am so glad that you have come. You have heard of the suicide that was committed this morning, have you not?"

"Yes." His voice was low and reverent.

"Then, tell me, Mr. Void, do you think it wrong to commit suicide?"

"There is a commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.' And he who murders himself or another is destroying one of God's creatures, therefore he is breaking the holy commandment!"

"You speak as though you have proofs in saying so."

"I have, Miss Landon. Because when a man destroys his own life he never does it bravely; he does it in one reckless stroke. He has to encourage himself, he has to put all thoughts of the hereafter from him; and that very action proves that he fears the future, that he dares not think long on what may be the consequences of his folly."

"Then you think that some people pause in the act?" Her breathing was intense.

"Yes, because the fear, the dread, the unfathomable *inner-sense*, warns him that there is something more bitter to come; and that dread would humble him to submission—he would live and righteously brave all ills of life. I believe that were we to read the souls of some of our nearest and dearest friends and daily acquaintances, we would be surprised at the many who have been tempted to self-destruction, and yet had the will to let their true Christian belief come in time to save them from ——"

"From what?"

"Perhaps from the barred door of heaven—who knows?"

"Then tell me, Mr. Void, do you think that praying for the suicide would help him any?"

"No, my friend, no! God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Death takes the soul past the healing of prayer. It leaves the spirit in the hands of God. Save your prayers for the living. Some need it badly enough, Heaven knows. But no prayer, not even prayer of the most earnest

and implicit faith, can help a ruined soul as a prayer from the soul itself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that your mission is doubly fulfilled if you can encourage a man to pray for himself. Your prayer may help him, but unless the prayer comes in faith from his own lips, he is not saved! Believe me, he is not. For, without belief and trust in God, one is lost!"

As he ceased speaking she raised tear-wet eyes to his.

"How blind, how hopelessly blind I have been," she half sobbed. "Oh, Mr. Void, if I had only known, I could have saved Jack Biron from his fearful death! I have had the chance, each day, to speak to him, to uphold him from his downward course, and yet I thought nothing of it. The others only laughed when they heard of his wild ways, and I was utterly careless."

"See that you do not lose another chance, dear," he gently replied. "When speaking of the judgment day to come, Jesus said, 'Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked and ye clothed me: I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done *it* unto me. And if ye do not this unto my brethren, you do it not

to me: and ye shall go away to everlasting punishment.' ”

A sharp little cry escaped Lila's lips. She bent toward him, her face pale and frightened.

“Then since I have not done right toward Jack Biron, shall I be put away to everlasting punishment?”

He smiled gently, as he would to a child.

“No, Miss Landon, not if you will be more watchful in the future, and do some of these things. Remember Jesus said, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me!’ ”

“I shall remember,” she said simply, a flush of hope on her fair face. “Oh, how your words uplift my thoughts to nobler purposes! No wonder that you do so much good. How proud you must feel.”

“Nay, my child, I feel only humble in the thought that I am serving God. It is the duty of every good man to teach his faith in God to others, and to teach all the holy commandments of righteousness to them; for Jesus ordered His eleven disciples to do so!”

“I see,” she answered, wistfully. “I am very ignorant.”

“No, you mean that you are gaining wisdom. Your soul has been veiled, but now you are letting the faith of Jesus Christ enter into it. Soon you will be in Jesus; then all will be well.”

“Oh, Mr. Void, are you sure?”

“Certain; if you will never pause to quench your present thirst.”

"I promise you that I won't!"

A gentle hand was placed over hers.

"No, dear, promise not me. Promise God."

She half bowed her head, feeling as though a prayer was uttered for her, so deep and reverent was his voice. Then as she looked up he said:

"Now I shall leave you. I am to dine with Eugene and have a talk with him. Then my afternoon will be spent, as usual, among the poor."

She caught her breath.

"Among the poor! You have been with them."

"I am always with the poor," he responded, smilingly. "I am poor myself, Miss Landon."

She laughed. "Then I am not afraid to be your friend," she retorted, gaily. "Please call on mamma and me while you are making your rounds."

"Thank you, I shall be pleased to do so. I have been waiting for the invitation."

And then, bidding her adieu, he left the store.

That evening when Lila arrived home, she remembered that she was to take Laury's little baskets to the home of Miss Lake, the heiress.

"And when I return, you shall have a shining half-dollar!" she cried, gaily, as she carefully wrapped the ten baskets and tied them securely. "Just think of it, mother. Our little Laury earning fifty cents a day. Why, he ought to be contented with half that much!"

"That is the truth, Laury, dear," replied Mrs. Landon, with a fond look at her child. "So don't work too steadily, my darling."

"No danger of that, mother," Laury laughed.

"Why, I have been dreaming under the chestnut tree all the afternoon. But I made five baskets this morning, so as to have ten in all."

Lila kissed him lovingly, and then put on her hat.

"I'll hurry and be back in time so as not to keep you waiting supper for me, mother," she said, smilingly, and then she took the baskets, and nodding gaily at Laury, left the room.

He waved at her from the window as she closed the gate, and she was thinking of his bright, happy face as she started on.

"Oh, how happy Miss Blake surely is," she murmured, as she hurried along. "How she can help the poor and lighten the burdens of the sick. Think how much pleasure her half-dollar will give to our patient Laury. Ah, she surely does not half realize how much joy her little act of kindness is bringing; and what a slight effort it is for her to buy these dainty little baskets."

Soon she reached the beautiful stone residence on the hillside, and springing lightly up the marble steps, she crossed the portico and rang the bell. A servant opened the door to her, and she made her errand known.

"Perhaps she may see you, miss," he said, respectfully. "But I'm not sure."

He conducted her into the magnificent reception-room, and then disappeared. Lila looked calmly about her.

"I wouldn't like to live among such luxuries," she was thinking. "The cost of that painting over the mantel would feed a poor family for months, and that gold vase would pay many a doctor's bill."

I should like to be able to help others, but I wouldn't like to have such expensive things about me. Since we get all our treasures in heaven, what is the use in keeping them with us here?"

For several moments she waited patiently; then as she thought of her watching mother, she moved restlessly.

"I ought to be contented to wait for that which will make Laury so happy," she thought, reproachfully, and she tried to feel comfortable as she leaned back in the rich chair of silk and plush. Then she sat up, as the servant came through the parted curtains.

"Mistress has a headache and cannot come down, miss," he said, regretfully. "But you are to leave the baskets and she will pay you some other time."

Quietly, Lila arose and allowed the servant to show her to the door. Not until she was on the sidewalk, beneath the star-lit sky, did she realize that this heiress, lying among costly luxuries, was too intent in herself to think of a poor child's happiness.

"Can such things be?" Lila asked herself, and then she slipped a silver half-dollar from her own well-worn purse. "Laury shall have his pay tonight if it takes my last cent," she murmured tearfully. "Never shall my darling know the selfish truth!"

Then as she hurried homeward, Lila comprehended what Jesus meant when He said: "A rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven."

"I am thankful to be poor," she thought. "My riches shall be in heaven!"

CHAPTER IV.

And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

* * *

While he remained in Hannibal, Eugene Davert always resided at his father's handsome residence, which was a three-story, brick building, situated two blocks from the Mississippi River. Two faithful servants were hired to look after the house while the masters were away, and everything was in readiness whenever they came on one of their many business trips. Upon this day the young master had invited Lauren Void to dine with him, and the two had just finished the meal.

As Eugene arose, he said:

"You drink wine, I see."

"Yes," was the quiet reply, "for Jesus did so. There is no harm in drinking it, my friend, if one does not tempt himself to drink too much. One glass a day more than satisfies me!"

Davert started toward the door, and then he paused.

"But do you smoke, Lauren?"

"I confess that I do not. I have a great dislike for the weed. Jesus has spoken of anointing one's

self, but he did not say to do so with the scent of tobacco smoke."

Eugene laughed aloud, although he saw that his friend was speaking earnestly. "Then you think there is no harm in smoking?"

"Yes, I think there is, when a man deprives his family of necessities to buy the tobacco. There is but one clear reason why men smoke and chew the plant."

"What is that?"

"Simply because they are nervous, and while they have something to chew or handle they feel steadier,—that is, for the time being. Many men will not believe this, but it is plain truth. Though it soothes the nerves, men do not seem to realize that they would be much healthier without it."

At this juncture the door opened and the old man servant started to enter the room. Upon seeing that they had not yet withdrawn, he started to retreat. Near this door was a palm in a large, expensive vase, and as he hurriedly turned, he, in some way, tilted the plant, and the vase went crashing to the floor. With a frightened face, the old man uttered a low cry and tried to save the fragments.

Eugene, his face white with anger, snatched the tongs from the hearth and sprang toward the trembling servant.

"How dared you? Do you not know that your masters prized that vase more dearly than anything else in the house? Confound you, I shall beat you to death! Never again shall you enter the services of this household."

With quivering lips the old negro crouched in the corner, his eyes pleading like a dumb brute's. No word escaped him as the tongs came flying toward his old, gray head.

A calm, firm hand grasped Eugene's, and the weapon of intended cruelty was wrenched from his grasp.

"Nay, my friend," said Lauren Void. "Remember what Jesus said: 'Inasmuch as ye show mercy to the least of these my brethren, ye have shown it unto me.' Though this man be your servant, Eugene Davert, the Creator who created you, created him also; and as God gave to you a soul, so he gave one unto this man. Show mercy, my friend, before it is too late to have mercy shown you."

As though pierced to the heart by these words, the young master shuddered visibly; then, in a husky whisper, he said:

"Come, my faithful man, I was angry,—beside myself. I mean you no harm; the accident could not have been avoided, I see. I might have done the same thing myself. Forget my words, they were the words of blinded anger."

Then he extended his white, jeweled hand and raised the trembling old negro to his feet. With his dim eyes full of gratitude the servant looked at his master, then he turned his gaze upon Mr. Void, and if ever human eyes expressed love and thanks, his did.

"God bless you, master, God bless you," he mumbled, reverently.

"Thank you, Burton," was Mr. Void's gentle reply. "I spoke for you, my friend, as I would for any of my brethren."

Then he turned and followed Eugene from the room. They walked along the luxurious hall and entered the splendid library. The young master seated himself near the window and beckoned Lauren Void to a chair near by.

"You called that negro servant your brother, Lauren?"

"Yes, for such did Jesus Christ call everyone. Why should we not? We are all of the same Father."

Davert leaned eagerly forward.

"You have been very patient with me, Lauren. Do you never lose control of yourself?"

"No, my friend. Religion is like hypnotism. The mind is easily guided if the soul is anxious to be filled; but when the soul is against filling, then the converter must be patient unto endurance, for such was Jesus Christ."

"Your words conquered my anger just now," was the brief response. "It may be because I am in a sad mood, Lauren. I have lost Lila Landon forever. I feel as though I could do anything to win her respect. I fear that she hates me."

"Nay, she pities, but she does not hate you! Eugene, your conduct toward her was too sinful to hate, for if she had fallen, you, too, would have shared the broken commandment. By her mother's faith in God, she is placed beyond the clutches of compunction. Had the child been innocent, you

could have ruined her through her ignorance only! Not through her inclination to do wrong!"

"But, Lauren, I offered her marriage and she refused. She could have made a good man of me had she accepted."

A quick breath came from Lauren's parted lips.

"You insulted the child, Eugene," was the calm reply. "Had you but offered honor in the first place, you would not be here repenting. She was right in refusing a man who had tempted her downfall. When a woman marries, she deserves a husband whom she knows will respect and love her."

Eugene winced and partly turned his face away.

"Well, I am avenged," he murmured, with pale face. "I can but admit that I keenly feel the great disappointment that I have dealt myself. I feel sorrowful, and yet I cannot feel angry."

"And why should you feel angry, Eugene? You tempted yourself in this wrong; it is but just that you should feel humble. My friend, sorrow wrings the words of feeling from the heart. If our lives were all happiness, we would be too joyous to pray. If but for sorrow, disappointments, deaths, our Saviour would, many times, be forgotten. Through sorrow, He seeks our hearts; through sorrow, we seek His presence."

"But can you call Him a loving Saviour when He gives us sorrow?"

"Ah, yes, indeed! For in sorrow He gives us consolation; in disappointments He encourages us; in death He gives us heaven,—if we will but seek these of Him. They will not come unsought."

"Ah, yes, death will!"

"Yes, my brother, but not true death. Were I to read a sinful man's mind at death, I would shudder. Were I to read a good man's mind at death, I would envy him the smile of peace that grew on his cold lips. The first would be false death; the second, true, pure death:—death that breathes of all the blissful pleasures of heaven."

"But what would be the breath of the false death?"

"No earthly person knows; that lies beyond the grave."

"Then you do not think that a sinful man and a good man share the same pleasures in heaven?"

"No, no, my brother, no! Not unless the sinful man fully repents before death, and feels that he is forgiven, for you know: He forgives you seventy times seven times. For as you forgive your brother's trespasses, so likewise shall your Heavenly Father forgive you. There would be no purpose in the earthly existence, no use in striving for right, were good and bad to share alike in heaven. How God deals with sinful souls, He alone knows!"

"Then you think it never too late to repent?"

"Yes. Believe, repent in deadly earnest, and you are saved; for Jesus died to save the sinners."

"Then, tell me, do you think that a good man and repentant sinner share the same pleasures of heaven?"

"I think so, for Jesus said to the robber: 'Thou shalt be with me in Paradise.' Men, with their souls in Christ, are equals."

"Then Jesus surely knows as well what the bad man, who never repents deserves."

"He does, my friend, for did He not say in one of His parables, that upon the servants asking their master if they should gather up the tares among the wheat, the master answered: 'Nay, lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

"He meant the good people as the wheat, and the bad ones as the tares, did He not?"

"Yes, dear brother."

"Then that tells you what God does with the bad ones. You see it says: Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them into bundles to burn them."

"You are mistaken, my friend. Jesus, remember, was speaking in parables. I know He said *burn*, but souls cannot be burnt. He said, Gather the wheat into my *barn*, but a barn is not at all like heaven, is it?"

The listener's eyes opened with dawning excitement.

"Good heavens, if I could reason things out as you do, I believe I'd go wild!" he cried. "How wonderful!" Then suddenly he paused.

"But, see here, when Jesus explained that parable to His disciples, He *did* say that the tares were the children of the wicked one; that they *would* be cast into the furnace of fire; that there

would be wailing and gnashing of teeth. After all"—with a deep sigh—"you are not exactly right."

"Of course, unrepented sin must have its punishment, my dear brother,—that is only just. Bodies may blaze in deathly torture, but I tell you again that souls, or spirits, *cannot* burn!"

"And why do you think this?"—with intense eagerness.

"Because our Lord God is merciful!"

A deep hush followed this last fervent sentence.

A glow of hidden emotion had leaped into Davert's dark eyes. He bent nearer his friend and placed one trembling hand on Mr. Void's arm.

"Lauren, I want to live in Christ as you are doing. I am sinful, cruel, passionate; do you think that if I repent faithfully I can be forgiven?"

"Eugene, let God keep your soul and you are saved. Strive for His good-will, and show mercy to every living being, so that He will show mercy unto you."

"Lauren, I will, I will. My friend, my brother, will you pray for me?"

"Yes, Eugene, I can pray for you, but I cannot do your praying. My friend, Jesus sent the multitudes away and went up into a mountain apart to pray; and when the evening was come, He was there alone. Go, thou, and do likewise. Pray for yourself in secret, and then return to me."

He pressed the young man's hand, then turned away.

"Be with God," he whispered; and then, as

Davert left the room, Lauren bowed his head upon the window-sill, and a strange, peaceful silence filled the room. "Loving Saviour, another soul seeks thy salvation; I pray Thee, turn him not away. Let him live in Christ, as he seeks to live!"

They were simple words, but a heart of faithful longing was their foundation. As surely as God hears and answers prayer of belief, so He heard and answered that one.

Ten minutes later, Lauren Void arose, his face one humble glow of gratitude. The door had opened. Davert came toward him and they clasped hands.

"My brother, your eyes, your face tells me all!"

"Yes, yes! I felt His presence everywhere! He gave me strength; He comforted me. The words for help escaped my lips before I was aware. I had only Him to lean upon. I prayed to Him as you never could have prayed for me!"

A deep, emotional silence followed. Then gently, earnestly, Lauren spoke:

"Ay, my friend, such is prayer in deadly earnest. Such is the prayer that God will answer. Such is the prayer that will forever keep you from temptation, if you will let it pass your lips in purest faith, day after day, hour after hour, if need be. My brother, Jesus said, 'All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.' See how clearly we realize the truth of that speech: When you are tempted to do wrong, go into a silent room and pray. When you arise you will no longer tempt yourself. You will think, 'I can-

not now sin, for the eyes of my Saviour are upon me, and He is leading me.' When you do this you are a true Christian, for you have given yourself to Christ."

"Lauren," said Eugene, huskily, "when you first rebuked me in my sinful acts I hated you,—yes, hated you. Now, my dearest friend, I thank God that you have lifted me from the pit of ignorance. What can I do to thank you?"

"This, Eugene. Come what will, forever believe in God, and in so believing you cannot sin."

"Lauren, you have saved me!"

"No, God has; without His aid I would be powerless. And now, my friend, I will leave you for to-day. While I am gone, think of how you can make your life one path of righteousness."

They clasped hands for the second time, and then Lauren Void walked from the room. Taking his hat from the hall-tree, he went from the house and started along the street. He had gone several blocks, and was walking thoughtfully along, when the frightened weeping of a child fell upon his ears.

He looked up quickly and saw that he was passing by the home of his friend, Mr. Marvin. This gentleman was in his front yard, just now holding the crying child by one arm, while he dealt several forcible blows of the twig upon the little one's shoulders.

"I shall teach you to obey me!" he was angrily commanding. "If you do it again, I shall lock you up in the basement."

Lauren Void turned, retraced his steps to the

front gate, and hurried along the path to his friend's side.

"Mr. Marvin," he said, gravely, "I pray you to consider before you continue with this punishment. What has the child done to vex you?"

With a highly flushed face, the man relinquished his hold on the child, and, turning, faced the visitor.

"Why, hello, Lauren! Glad to see you, indeed! What has the child done to vex me? Well, he will persist in eating those green apples, and I have repeatedly told him to leave them alone."

"Have you told him why you do not wish him to eat them?"

Mr. Marvin looked astonished.

"Why, I've told him that they'll make him sick, of course. What else is there to tell him?"

Lauren extended his hand to the weeping child, and drew him near.

"Now, my little man," he said, gently, "do you like those green apples?"

"Yes, sir," was the bashful reply, while two chubby fists were rubbing the overflowing eyes.

"Do you like it when they make you sick?"

"No, sir!" with a shy glance at the beautiful, wistful face above him.

"Do you like to be sick, and have your mother lose her sleep to sit up with you, and make you take bitter medicine?"

"No, sir, I don't!"—this with emphasis.

"Then, little one, why do you eat the apples?"

Two big, wondering eyes were lifted to the grave ones above him.

"I never saw before how wrong it was," he said, slowly. Then he turned to his father. "Why didn't you tell me this, papa, 'stead of whippin' me?"

Mr. Marvin, coloring and paling, remained silent.

The child turned again to Lauren.

"It's hard to keep from eatin' 'em," he confessed, shyly.

"You say your prayers, don't you, dear?"

"Oh, yes, sir, ev'ry night 'fore I go to bed."

"Then, Bobby, to-night when you pray, tell Jesus that you will not eat any more green apples and make your mamma trouble. Then when you are tempted to eat them say to yourself: 'Papa loves me and doesn't want me to eat them and make myself sick. And since I've promised Jesus, I won't eat any more.' Will you do this, little one?"

Two quivering lips were raised for a kiss.

"I will, sir," was the willing reply, "for mamma says I must do anything for Jesus."

The kiss was given; then Lauren turned to Mr. Marvin and gently took the twig from that man's hand.

"Jesus said, Spare not the rod, Mr. Marvin, but you have the wrong sort of rod. I have just now used the rod of which Jesus spoke. Spare not the rod means: Teach your children righteousness through the *rod* of faith in God! You are blindly following the downward path of ignorance. Let me raise the veil from off your eyes, my friend. You see how eagerly and willingly your child took

the rod of which Jesus spoke; do you understand me?"

"I—I," gasped Mr. Marvin, "I—why, you astonish me! After all these years of reading the Bible I never realized how wrong I was! Good heavens! who would have thought it?"

"Aye, my friend, men may know the laws of the world, and yet be ignorant of the Bible. Men may have gained all the knowledge that colleges teach and yet be ignorant of the holy commandments. Men may have read the Bible again and again, and still be going blindly along the pathway of destruction. It is for us, who live in Christ, to unveil this ignorance to the poor and great alike; and as we save souls, so will these souls save others."

"Right, right!" Mr. Marvin earnestly responded. "If there were a little more religion in Congress we would have more profitable laws, I think!"

"You are speaking truly. Some of to-day's laws are cruelly destructive, especially to wives and mothers."

Lauren Void turned suddenly and pointed down the street.

"Do you see that small, white cottage at the corner there?" he asked, gravely.

"Yes. A middle-aged woman, who takes in sewing for a livelihood, lives there, doesn't she? I got my wife to give her some needle work to do."

"Thank you, Mr. Marvin; I am continually hearing of your own and your wife's good works, and I claim you as a brother in Christ, so I shall tell you the true facts of that poor woman's life.

"Mrs. Blunt was once a happy wife, and mother of three healthy, religious children. Her husband was a prosperous farmer, and their many acts of kindness were known through the country. Suddenly, Mr. Blunt died of apoplexy, leaving no will behind him. When the estates were at last settled, Mrs. Blunt discovered that she had only the home and a few acres of land left. Then misfortune seemed to pursue her. Diphtheria broke out in the family. First, her little son expired, and her heart was nearly broken; then her eldest child, a daughter, died of the fatal malady, and only one little girl was left. The dead children were buried, and the disease seemed to have left the last child to her. But one day the little girl came in from her play and said: 'Mother, while I was sitting under the cherry tree my sister came to me and said, "Be happy, Ethel, you will soon be with me."' *"

"The child's words frightened Mrs. Blunt so that she kept the most solicitous care of her only daughter, but a week later the dreaded disease had taken this little one, too. Then the poor, heart-broken mother sold her home to pay the doctor's bill and the funeral expenses, and with the little gold that she had left she came here. She sought work, but her grief and cares had so weakened her physical strength that she could not do hard labor, and the consequences were that she drifted into a life of shame. While she was emerging from a

* This is a true incident which happened in Hannibal several years ago.

saloon one night I met her with a group of drunken men. I drew her aside and spoke to her. You know the rest. I saved her, and there she lives in that cottage, a repentant sinner, her soul in God's keeping and a prayer of thanks on her lips every hour for having been saved from destruction." indignantly.

"And this is the law's work!" cried Mr. Marvin,

"Yes," murmured Lauren Void. "If Congress would pass a law that the wife should inherit all, as the husband does, all would be well. Where men should uphold and protect the weaker sex, they are trampling them down. Congress is the key to many a woman's downfall. No wonder that women are becoming masculine and independent in their ideas; they are forced to be so by the law of man. Can a true woman be expected to remain in the family circle and be the guide and brightness of the home, as God intended her to be, when she has no home, and is compelled to do the labor of a man? No! It is impossible. In strength and education, man may be superior to woman; but in the eyes of God woman is the superior of man. And the day will yet come when woman will be the equal of man on earth; when it will be woman's law as well as man's law that rules the destiny of this world."

"I fear you are right," said Mr. Marvin, with a comical grimace. "Well, bless 'em, they deserve it."

They clasped hands, and after kissing Bobby once more, Lauren took his departure.

"I want to have a longer talk with you one of these days," said Marvin.

"You are always welcome at my rooms," Lauren answered. "I would not leave so soon, but I have an appointment with Miss Lake, the heiress."

CHAPTER V.

For whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted.

* * *

The lights were shining brightly in the luxurious drawing-room of Miss Lake's home. Although an heiress, she was an orphan, and an elderly aunt lived with her as a companion. This evening the aunt was not present, and Maud was walking restlessly about over the velvet carpet, her eyes sparkling strangely, her thoughts evidently centered upon an absorbing idea that made her unconscious of anything near her.

This was not the first time that she had been expecting the arrival of Lauren Void. They had known each other for months already, and yet he had failed to awaken her soul to the responsive chords of righteousness. He would tell her to help the poor, and she would do it; he would tell her to pray, and she did so; he would talk to her for hours at a time about Jesus Christ, his musical voice becoming more wistful and pained as he failed to arouse any glow of faith in her dark eyes. She would listen with her head respectfully bent, but that was all. She was an enigma to him, and

yet he never faltered. He believed that she was hungering for something to awaken her soul to a higher cause, and he would endure monthly, ay, yearly rebuke, if he could but open her soul to Christ.

People who knew her called Maud Lake a strange creature. She was too still, too secretive for them, and her indifferent moods in no way attracted friends to her. Though wealthy, she went little into society, and often when people sent her invitations she would return the cards unread. But she was rich, and many of her faults were overlooked, and to those in higher society she was "a dear, sweet girl, but just a bit peculiar, you know."

On this night, Maud Lake's calmness seemed greatly ruffled, and the rich lace over her bosom rose and fell in half-suppressed excitement. She had paused before a window and was gazing unseeingly out into the creeping darkness.

"Mr. Void," announced the servant, as he ushered the visitor into the room. Then the door closed and they were alone.

She did not move as he came across the room toward her and paused close by her side.

"Maud, my dear friend, may I hope that you are thinking of our loving Saviour, who sends sweet night to everyone, so that the weary may rest and the ill may sleep in peaceful bliss?"

She turned to him then, an odd little smile on her lips.

"No, I was thinking of you only," she said, dryly. "Pray be seated. I was nearly in dream-land."

Instead of obeying her he placed one firm hand over hers.

"Maud, how can you live alone, day after day, and yet not think of heavenly things? Surely you think of evil if you do not think of righteousness. Tell me, please, of what you do think. You are so secretive, my friend, that I cannot unveil your soul as I am accustomed to doing. I came here to-night positively determined to make you ask me questions, instead of choosing the subject myself."

She did not draw away, but she half turned her gaze toward the window. For a moment she was silent and he stood watching her.

She had a long, dark face, her cheek-bones high and prominent, with a deep, irregular flush near the eyes,—more like the flush from fever, but still natural and unbecoming, causing her black eyes to stare out like leaden coals, darkly painted. Her hands, though long and slender, were white as snow, and her arms and shoulders were all that could be desired. Her lips, her only handsome feature, were curved, red and seductive in every way. She wore a strange, serpent-like ring on her little finger, which gleamed with a dark, hard glare and repulsed the eyes, causing one to read and yet not read the deep or shallow soul of the wearer: *which*, who could rightly tell? No one, he thought, until one had become as confidential as possible with her. He wondered how long it would be before she would allow him to penetrate the depths of her strange, secretive, veiled soul. Veiled it was, he knew, from the shadows that

seemed to rest and hover in her eyes, now hidden by the long, dark lashes.

He looked until an unconscious sigh escaped his lips.

"Maud, have you nothing to say to me?"

With a slow, graceful movement, she turned to him.

"Lauren, tell me, were I to live a life with one sole aim to help, comfort and make others happy, and do all the good I possibly could, and yet never believe in God, would I be saved?"

"No, Maud, no! For Jesus said unto the chief priests and the elders: 'For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the *publicans* and the *harlots* believed him; and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.' So that tells us that were a sinful person to repent and believe in God, he would be better than you, were you to lead such a life."

"I cannot think so."

"Just bring reason to your aid and you can. Remember that Jesus said, 'So the least shall be first, and the first least.' Without belief in God, Maud, no one can be saved. What, my friend, would save him?"

"Nothing; you have me there!"

"But, Maud, I cannot think that you do not believe in God."

"Well, no, I do think there is a God, but I cannot think nor feel more."

"Then the time will come when you will go further, when you will learn to love and fear your

Saviour as any true Christian does. Maud, to do this, you must work for Him. In doing good to those less fortunate than you, you will be traveling toward the Cross. Your life has been too uniform for your emotional nature. No, do not raise those indignant eyes, Maud. I have learnt that, once in the faith of Christ, you would be one of His most faithful servants. My friend, true sorrow is what would take your soul to Christ."

He was surprised at the fearful paleness that crept over her face; for a moment her strength left her, and she leaned against him, her form trembling perceptibly.

"Maud, forgive me. Have I frightened you? What is it, little one, are you not well?"

With a great effort she controlled herself and moved slightly from him.

"Tell me," she panted, her eyes glowing, "tell me, when people die, do their spirits go at once to heaven, or do they linger awhile on earth?"

"As soon as a person is dead, Maud, his spirit is gone into the hands of God. I have been with too many death scenes not to know that. Dust thou art, and to dust thou shalt return. And since spirits never moulder, they could not turn to dust; spirits live forever, but not on earth."

"Why are you not proud of yourself?" she asked, breathlessly, her glowing eyes lifted to his. "Think of all that you have done!"

"Yes, of all that I have done," he murmured, humbly. "Do you remember what Jesus said, Maud? 'Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief

among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life as a ransom for many.' My good work serves only to deepen my humility; for, through humility, I gain the will of God; wherefore, were I to become vain and proud, I would lose all that I have gained. For whosoever shall exalt himself, shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted."

"I understand you," she said, scarcely above a whisper. "Then, Lauren, it would be sinful, would it not, were I to worship an earthly being and not worship God?"

Her head was turned aside and he was not aware of the wild excitement in her eyes.

"Sinful?—ah, yes, indeed, my friend. For when the devil showed Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said, 'All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me,' Jesus replied: 'Get thee hence, Satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

A look of deepest pain had lined her face, and she bowed her head as he finished speaking. A moment later she looked up.

"Why did Jesus say to take no thought of what we shall eat, what we shall drink, or of which we shall be clothed. How could a person live without thinking of the morrow?"

"You do not understand His meaning, Maud. He said: 'Seek *first* the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.' He meant to live in the thought of

heaven, not to live for only the morrow's pleasures and necessities. When Jesus spoke of the ending of the world He said, 'Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.' Therefore you should live your life as though each day will end it. Do kind acts each hour if possible, so that when death comes it will find your record irreproachable as you can make it. With such a life of righteousness you will find that you can also have clothes, and food, and drink."

"How well you understand it all," she murmured, falteringly. "While you talk I feel as though something is pleading for my soul, and I want to surrender; but I cannot, I cannot."

Sobbingly she buried her face in her hands and turned away. But a strong arm closed around her waist, and Lauren's voice, pleading and wistfully firm, murmured to her:

"Maud, Maud, you must surrender. Break this will of yours, and your soul will be in Christ's keeping. Now is your time, Maud, while a higher power is grasping your soul. Kneel, pray to your Creator to keep your surrendered soul in His keeping."

He clasped her hands, and in her agitation she fell upon her knees.

"Maud, tell God, tell God!" he whispered reverently in her ear; then, with tear-dimmed eyes, he hurried from the room.

As surely as he had saved other souls, he knew that hers was saved. A wild joy stirred in his heart as he realized that, so soon, he had succeeded in converting her. As he stood on the portico he

bared his head beneath the golden moonlight, his beautiful face lifted heavenward, the faith and trust of a little child in his eyes.

"Oh, my loving Saviour, guide my footsteps as Thou hast guided them this day. Two more souls have been placed on the Christian roll. Through righteousness, dear Lord, nearer and nearer I feel Thy hands, Thy presence!"

With a deep breath of reverence, he replaced his hat and descended the gleaming steps. Once upon the sidewalk, he quickened his steps, for at eleven o'clock he was to exchange places with a friend who was watching beside a sick child. As he crossed the street and started down the avenue, he saw a lady's figure a few yards in front of him. It seemed strangely familiar, and as he hastened forward he recognized Lila Landon.

"Miss Landon," he called, softly, "will you please be merciful and allow me to overtake you? I fear it will be an exhaustive race if you do not."

At the sound of his musical voice she paused and turned quickly, her pretty face brightening with a welcome smile.

"You, Mr. Void! How delightful! Yes, come to me at once. I shall not give you a race to-night; I am a bit tired."

He reached her side and they fell into step.

"Tired? Just physically, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" she laughed, understanding his meaning. "Do not fear about my faith in Christ, Mr. Void. My soul, I assure you, will never grow weary."

"That's right, little one," he responded, gently.

"And where have you been that you are returning home at this late hour? It is nearly eleven o'clock."

"Yes, I know it is late; that accounts for my hurrying so. I fear that mother will remain awake for my return, so I am solicitous on her account. I have been to visit Ethel's mother. Since the baby's birth, Mrs. Trenton is not at all well, and I have been with her all the afternoon. The child is fretful, too, so you see I had my hands full; but I enjoyed it, for before I left both the mother and child were sleeping peacefully, and Mrs. Trenton seemed unusually brightened; much more so than she has been for months, so the nurse told me."

"Bless my little peace-maker," he said gently. "Do you realize, dear, that you are doing all this unto Jesus?"

"Realize it!" She raised her soulful eyes to him, a glow of heavenly light in their depths. "Oh, yes, yes, yes! I was just now thinking that I have done something that you do: pleasing Christ. No wonder you love such a duty; it makes one so happy, so glad in the knowledge that their life is fruitful, instead of being thrown away in the useless pleasures and sins of this world. You have opened my eyes, Mr. Void, and I am seeing clearer every moment."

"Bless you, dear!" he cried in gratitude. "I am well pleased with you. You are hungering for righteousness, and you are being filled. Oh, my child, if everyone would turn their faces upward, if they would but seek the hand of God and place

their souls in His keeping! How easily they could do it; and heaven would be their reward. Instead, they live uncertain lives, *fearing*—they don't know *what*! But with the work of our lives we shall save thousands among thousands."

"Ah, yes!" she whispered, moving closer to him. "And—and I hope that we can save Mr. Davert."

He saw the deep blush on her fair cheeks as she looked shyly up at him. A glow of pleasure leaped into his eyes.

"I was going to tell you, dear," he said, simply. "Eugene has given his soul to Christ. I talked with him after I left you, and now,—all is well!"

"You have saved him? Oh, Mr. Void!"

Her blue eyes were bathed in happy tears.

"Yes, his soul is saved through you, Miss Landon. Because he could not win you he was sorrowful. In his sorrow, dear, he sought God. In God he found peace."

"Then I helped a little, didn't I?" she asked, wistfully. "Oh, Mr. Void, if I could only know that I had uplifted a soul as you have done!"

He could not suppress a smile at her childish eagerness to follow his example.

"You may rest assured, then, that you have done so. Little one, always keep that desire foremost in your heart; it is the desire of Christ."

"How your words cheer me!" she cried, her face radiant with pleasure. "I understand why you are so humble. I see now that when I am doing good my only wish is to do more, to bring more comfort to the troubled, more peace to the ill, more food to the hungry."

In a fever of sympathy, he turned and caught her hand.

"Little one, you are safe in Christ; fear no longer, you are following the right path now."

"And you have saved me!"—humbly.

"Yes; saved you so that you may save others, dear. And the more we save, the greater is our reward; for the saved ones continue to save others! Thus we form a rod of faith that grows greater daily, being strengthened by the souls that link its construction. For, where faith is Christianity, the rod will never end!"

"What a grand, noble work!" she responded, her glowing eyes raised to his. They were approaching her home now, and the lamplight shone from the sitting-room window.

"I so often think of Ethel," she said, abruptly. "Mr. Void, have you heard anything about her since the elopement?"

"No, dear, nothing. I only hope that she is not too miserable in her downfall. If I but knew of her whereabouts, I would go to her at once. As it is, we must wait."

"I only hope that we will not have to wait very long," she said, wistfully. "I love Ethel so well; she has been like a sister to me. Have you seen her father lately?"

A pained look crossed his face.

"I met him this morning. He looked miserable, but I talked to him until he promised to come to me each day until his unhappiness was gone. It was a pitiful misunderstanding,—the divorce. And only through false pride did Mrs. Trenton

marry her present husband. It hardly seems that a year has passed since the parting, but I am glad that at last Ethel's father has come home. I may at least save him from evil!"

"Oh, I hope so! I hope so!" cried Lila, her face pale with uneasiness. "When I was holding Mrs. Trenton's child on my lap to-day I wanted to say: 'You are a child of the wrong father; you are the child of a mother who has two living husbands. Whose child, then, are you?' Mr. Void, it is terrible that such things thrive to existence. It frightens me!"

"Ignorance is their downfall," he said, sadly. "It lies in our power to unveil their eyes."

They had reached the small front gate and he was holding it open for her.

"I think that I shall never marry," she murmured with a deep sigh. "Marriage, with the laws of to-day, presents such a fearful outlook!"

She raised her eyes, and her gaze became riveted to the light in his own.

"Do not say that, little one. In future days, when you learn to love a man who is worthy of your keeping, I think that you will justly give yourself to him."

A deep blush dyed her pretty face; her gaze wandered and fell.

"Perhaps," she murmured, shyly.

With an effort he closed the gate and then turned to her, as she stood silent on the other side.

"Your mother and Laury are well, I hope?"

"Yes, indeed, and Laury has been in excellent

spirits all day long. He is always wishing that you would come and talk to him, though."

"And I shall do so whenever I am off duty. But I must not keep you waiting. Good-night, little one, and God bless you."

"Good-night, Mr. Void." She spoke softly, and half bowed her head as he spoke the blessing; then she turned and went toward the house.

He waited to see that she was safely indoors, then he turned away.

"She loves Eugene Davert," he murmured; but though a deep pain hovered in his dark eyes it did not kill the beautiful light of faith that lurked therein.

CHAPTER VI.

—

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake!

* * *

From his dead father, Lauren Void inherited quite a large income, but instead of spending it for a life of luxury and selfish splendor he let his aunt, who was the mother of a large family, reside in his own home, and he rented two rooms in the home of an old woman, who depended entirely on this way to earn a livelihood.

Old Mrs. Clendon called him her boy, and if true love ever dwelt in a human heart it lived in her heart for Lauren Void. Her greatest happiness was in cooking him delicious little dishes and making his rooms as bright and cheerful as possible. Motherless, and with a heart of love for his fellow-creatures, Lauren returned her deep affection, and they were as happy as any true mother and son could be.

On as small an amount as possible Lauren supplied his own daily necessities, and all the remainder of his income he spent for comforts and wants of the poor. He was no more reluctant to work than the humblest laborer, and as often as he found time he worked as hard as any of them,

and gave his earnings to the poor. Although not a regular preacher, he often, in the case of illness, filled the pulpit for a loving brother; and very often people called on him to preach to them. His earnest words, straight from a yearning heart, touched many souls and led them in peace to Christ. And thus he lived, his sole aim in life to uplift the souls of his ignorant brethren.

Although it was ten o'clock on this particular morning, he and Mrs. Clendon were still seated at the breakfast table, for he had been sitting with the sick child since midnight and had had but a few hours' slumber. Always solicitous that he should have all the sleep possible, Mrs. Clendon would have waited breakfast for him until supper time, if such an occurrence were necessary.

Just now, she was eagerly watching and seeing that he took plenty of the fried fish, the dainty, buttered toast, and other tempting viands on the table. Year in and year out she ate only toast and coffee for breakfast, and now, seeing that he was eating as heartily as usual, she began her own meal with a keen relish of satisfaction.

"The child is better, I hope, dear?" she said, with a quick, little bite at her toast.

"Yes, mother, much better, thank you. The fever is gone, and this morning as I held Ben's little hand in mine he opened his eyes and said: 'You have cured my pain, Lauren, and when I first looked up I thought you were Jesus. I think you are very much like Him, anyhow.'"

"Ah, Lauren, I've always told you that children

know more in their innocence than do grown men in their ignorance."

"The child's words go to show how near the little soul was to heaven, mother. You see he had been thinking of Jesus."

"I think of Jesus quite often, too, dear, when you are around," said Mrs. Clendon, softly.

"Thank you, mother, dear. That must be because I am continually dwelling upon His sacred work on earth. Oh, blessed Jesus, meek and mild!"

"Lauren," said Mrs. Clendon, very gently, "have you ever thought what you should do were I to die and leave you alone?"

A pained look crept into his dark eyes as he winced and raised them to her old, loving face.

"Die? Oh, mother, why do you talk so? Surely our merciful Father will spare you several years yet. But, still, earth is nothing like heaven, is it, mother?—and you would not have a troublesome boy to look after there."

"Dearest," said the old lady, reprovingly, "my boy is no trouble to me, remember that. And—no, I may live quite a long while yet, but, Lauren, I should like to see you with a wife by your side before I do leave you. Some gentle, Christian girl, who will be a comfort and help to you; someone"—her old voice quivered—"who will love you as I do."

A strange paleness had crossed his face, and his lips, for an instant, compressed with hidden emotion.

"No one could love me as you do, mother,—no

one, excepting my own mother, and she is happy in heaven."

There was a slight pause.

"Tell me, Lauren, have you ever thought of marrying?"

"Scarcely, mother, for only until lately has my heart ever been awakened to a love of that order."

Her eyes brightened.

"Then you are learning to love some sweet girl, dear?"

"I was, mother,—until last night; then I discovered that her heart was centered upon another. Now my course is to learn to think of her as a sister only. I am thankful that my eyes are opened before my affection had taken root. It has lived only to die, like a child perishing on its mother's breast. Such is the will of God."

His musical voice was low but steady, and Mrs. Clendon's eyes of pity brightened considerably. Having finished eating she arose, and, going to his side, pressed her lips to his white forehead.

"My darling boy, I am glad, for your sake, that the wound has not left a scar. Are you willing to speak her name to your old mother?"

"Lila Landon, dear," he replied, gently. "You see she is not a stranger to you."

"No, indeed, my boy. I have heard a great deal of good about her. She would have made you an admirable wife, Lauren. She is so thoughtful, so loving, so kind."

"As if I do not realize her good points, mother!" he responded with a half smile, as he raised his

beautiful face to hers. "She is all that a man could desire:—pure, womanly, and with her soul in Christ's keeping. Ah, I fear that she is far too good for me, anyway."

"Nay, my boy, that is not it. But God knows best, darling. Perhaps, by-and-by, some other woman will creep into your heart. Lila, my boy, is not the only good girl in this world, although she be above the average."

"You are right, mother, but Cupid is a contrary little fellow. He woos our affections here and there with a rashness that sometimes breaks a heart."

She bent anxiously above him, her eyes gazing into his.

"Lauren, you are speaking the truth to your old mother? You are sure that this love can leave your heart without a pain?"

"No, mother, not without a pain, for what true love may do that?" He pressed her dear old, wrinkled hand to his lips. "But, last night, when I was with her I realized my love, and as I discovered her heart was another's, I surrendered!"

"And you are sure, my boy, that this disappointment will not shadow your life?"

He laughed then, a low, pleasing laugh.

"A disappointment shadow my life, mother? No, dearest, it only serves to make my love deeper and purer for Christ, for the more griefs that come to us, the more we realize that God is our greatest and most loving friend. When all the world is darkness, when we stand alone without an earthly friend, we have God. No matter where

we be, we have but to look up and lean on Him. He will strengthen us if we but ask, for God is everywhere!"

"My darling, you are a good, noble boy! May God bless you and bring a deserving happiness to you for all your unselfish deeds."

As he sat with half-bowed head, a low rapping echoed on the parlor door.

"Someone is knocking," said Mrs. Clendon. "I shall go and admit them."

She hurried into the next room and opened the front door. Mr. Marvin stood outside, his pleasant face one broad smile.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Clendon. I came over to have a talk with Lauren. He is at home, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, and has just finished his breakfast. Bless you, come right in and don't stop for an invitation. Here, Lauren, dear, is Mr. Marvin come to see you."

She ushered the visitor into the kitchen, and Lauren, with a cry of pleasure, arose and clasped hands with his friend.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Marvin. You are welcome indeed. Come into my den, please, and then mother won't be bothered while she is clearing away the dishes."

They entered Lauren's room, which was brightened with a large bouquet of roses on a small center table; besides this, a climbing vine was bordering the half-open window, with its beautiful crimson blossoms hanging just above the sill, where the light wind brushed the sweet perfume into the room.

"What a cosey nook!" cried Mr. Marvin, as he seated himself in a low chair near the window. "You are lucky in having such a loving friend as Mrs. Clendon, my boy. All my life I have known her, and if ever she did else than good deeds I am not aware of it. She was born to make others happy and she has fulfilled the promise of her birth."

"I can willingly agree with you there, Mr. Marvin. Mother has relied on Christ all her life, and He has ever been her faithful friend. And that reminds me of Bobby and the green apples. How has he behaved since yesterday?"

"Bless the child," said Marvin, with tears and laughter mingling in his eyes. "I listened at the door last night when he was saying his prayer, and I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. This is what he said, Lauren: 'Jesus, when I go near the tree, please lead me away and I will go; but you won't mind, will you, dear Jesus, if I stand a little while under the tree, just to look at the apples and wish for 'em? I won't eat any, Jesus, but I like to think how good they'd taste.' Then the little fellow crawled into his bed and was soon fast asleep."

A glow of tenderness was in Lauren's dark eyes.

"What a sweet child," he murmured, lovingly. "Bobby has a Christian soul, Mr. Marvin, and it remains with you, his father, to keep him unspotted from the many sins of this world."

"I realized that when you left me yesterday, Lauren. I shall never forget the lesson that you taught me; it was one for which I am very thank-

ful. I was passing a disreputable house last night when a group of men and painted women came out. They were all drunk and their boisterous laughter and loud talking echoed in the street. I thought of how easily growing children drift into a downward course like this unless the parents guide their steps into the path of righteousness. Think of the life of these sinful men and women, Lauren. What do you think will be their lot?"

Lauren Void's face paled; for a second he shuddered.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." His voice was half choked with pain. "Heaven have mercy on them! With *impure* hearts, what shall they *see*? Is life such a frivolous matter to them that they dare to so trifle with the good will of God? If they would but regret their lives and repent; no matter how lowly they have journeyed along the sinful path, no matter what they have done, if they would but repent, if they would but place their future lives in God's keeping, they would be saved. It is never too late to repent, never too late to ask for and receive forgiveness from God. All that they need do is to repent, to open their souls to Christ and to live in Him. Oh, if I could save them—save them from themselves!"

"Well, why don't you try to save them?"

"I do,—I am, in all cases where I can, without arousing their unjust wrath. I cannot go further, knowing that, Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God." His eyes had grown dark, wistful. "But, believe me,

where I can, I do try to save them; I have saved them,—am saving many of them,—thank God!”

“How do you know you have saved them?”

With sparkling, tear-dimmed eyes, Lauren turned to his questioner.

“Because, with their own lips, they have told me so; and in their telling I have seen!”

“Seen what?”

“Seen that they have unveiled their souls to God!” His voice trembled uncontrollably. He turned his face away. “Bless them, bless them, bless them!” came the reverent whisper on the air.

There was a short, profound silence.

Mr. Marvin stirred uneasily.

“But they say that you are a hypocrite, that you don’t mean half you say; that your words are only spoken for effect; that you are trying to win notoriety through your new ways of viewing life.”

Lauren’s face came quickly into view; his curved lips were slightly parted in a tender smile.

“New ways of viewing life? How odd! When my views are only a repetition of what Jesus Christ taught when He was a young man. I see you smile—understand. I find the purest peace in these words of Jesus: ‘Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake!’”

“I understand you; and yet do you think it really right for these people to so publicly proclaim their religion, in having camp-meetings as they do here about Hannibal and other cities?

Do you think it just of them to so clearly reveal their devotion to God?"

"Yes, for in doing so they do noble work. And you know Jesus said: 'Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.' These camp-meetings save many wandering souls daily, and their glorious work is annually placing thousands of repentant souls in God's keeping."

"Why don't you join them, then? Why do you remain here?"

"I should like to very much, but all of us cannot go. Still, we are doing as much as a single one of them, if we try to do all the good we can for those about us. For it is as Jesus said: 'Who-soever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men to do so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall *do* and *teach* them, shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven!' So you see we may do good work wherever we are."

"Still, I do not clearly understand you. I have read the Bible myself, and Jesus said that when we pray we should not pray as the hypocrites do, standing in the street corners, that they may be seen by men. He said that, instead, we should enter our closet, and when we have closed the door, pray to our Father which is in secret; and that our Father which seeth in secret shall openly reward us. Now these people at the camp-meetings pray in public; they do not go into a secret closet. How can you call their work noble?"

Lauren gazed at his questioner, his eyes lighted with soulful love.

"Ah, my brother, see you not how wonderfully noble their good work is? For the sake of saving other souls, they pray in public for them; but when one prays alone for *himself*, you will find him in his closet!"

"Right, right! I never thought of that! Then there is——"

"There is something else? Do not hesitate. Speak to me as you would to a brother, for such I am to you."

"Jesus said that we should not do our alms before men, to be seen by them; that we get no reward for so doing. He said that only hypocrites sound their trumpets before them, when they do their alms. He said that we should do our alms in secret, not letting the left hand know what the right hand is doing, and that our Father, seeing in secret, shall openly reward us. By alms, He meant giving, did He not?"

"Yes, giving. If your gift to the poor be one cent, if your alms be one million dollars, let no one know but God!"

"Why do most of the people who give large alms, then, like to have everyone know it? They give in a way that people are bound to hear of it. Now, how is that?"

"That, my brother, is the blowing of trumpets before them. Theirs is an earthly, not a heavenly reward,—poor, blind souls! Jesus said: 'Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself, shall be exalted. Cleanse

first that *which is within* the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Even so ye outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.' ”

The trembling voice ceased abruptly. There was a silence, broken by the sobbing of the wind outside the open window.

Mr. Marvin was too eager to allow the silence to continue.

“You mean, then, that were I to give a dollar to a poor man, without anyone’s knowledge, and that were another man to give five hundred dollars to a charitable society, letting everyone know it, that my reward would be as great as his?”

“Yes, according to the Bible, your reward would be much the greatest and the *purest*!”

“Then you believe that this rich man who openly gave so much to the poor is a hypocrite? This Mr. ——”

“Please stop, my brother. I have only been quoting the Bible to you. There is also a sentence, ‘Judge not, that ye be not judged!’ So we must not bring personal experiences into our conversation. I have been speaking the truths as Jesus taught us. I was using no names, remember.”

“I see. I beg your pardon.”

“Nay, there is none to beg. *I* tempted you to say that.”

A dawning light of comprehension crept into Mr. Marvin’s eyes.

“By George! Come to think of it, you did!”

Their eyes met; they laughed and clasped hands.

"Good! You understand me now?"

"Yes; to you, at last, my soul owes its awakening!"

"My brother, I am glad to hear you say those words. I have been tempted, many times, to go to you and plead with you about your son's rearing, but now you have come to me, and all is well. Parents should not be cruel to their children, for Jesus said, 'Provoke not your children unto wrath,' and cruelty leads a child to sin in secret, so that his father may not know to punish him. Parents should not over-indulge a child, for indulgence teaches a child to worship self, and, in his ruin, he has no respect for his parents, nor for anyone else. A child, from earliest infancy, should be taught and reared in the faith of Christ, and in living thus his parents should strive to reason with the child, as they wish God to reason with them."

"Lauren, your words shall be my future guidance. I have been trying to teach Bobby rightfully, but I have been dreadfully ignorant of the true way. His mother has been nearer right than I."

"Ah, it takes a mother to know!" murmured Lauren, his eyes uplifted, as though seeking the presence of his own mother, who had died in his infancy.

"A man should never forget that a woman is his mother," he added, softly.

At this juncture the door opened hurriedly, and Mrs. Clendon looked in, her usually calm face expressing keen excitement.

"Lauren," she cried, "there is a strike at the

lumber mill, and the laborers want you there. Go at once, dear, and ask Mr. Marvin to excuse you."

"Of course I shall excuse him, for I will accompany him," said Mr. Marvin, as the two men hastily arose. "Too bad, too bad, these strikes are becoming very frequent of late!"

Lauren got his hat from the hall-tree, and bidding Mrs. Clendon a loving adieu, left the house with Mr. Marvin by his side.

"Oh, Lord, bring peace upon those hard-worked men!" prayed Mrs. Clendon, thinking of those laboring mill hands, as she watched from the window until her boy was out of sight.

CHAPTER VII.

—

The poor and merciful will be greatest in heaven; and the least in heaven will be the rich and pitiless.

* * *

The large lumber mill was deserted. The machinery was still, and not a human being remained in the building. More than one hundred idle laborers were standing in groups about the yard, some of them quiet and sullen, others angrily threatening their employers, and others sad and despondent. Lauren Void's heart ached for his troubled brethren, and as he came among them his face was grave and stern.

"Justice shall be done to you!" he cried. "Fear not the worst. Put your faith in God and ask His aid. I am one of you. I shall do all that lies in my power to uplift you from this serious disaster."

He stopped before one of the men, whom he had known for years.

"Blending, how is it? Tell me all."

"One of the bosses came this morning, sir, and said that our wages would have to be lowered. He said that times are hard and that he paid us more than we deserve, anyway. More than we deserve!

My God! We can scarcely keep from starving to death with what we get; what could we do with less? It is impossible. While our employers drive about in fine carriages, we labor like slaves all day long, and then hardly get sufficient wages to buy food for our wives and children. We had to oppose it, sir; we cannot live on smaller wages,—it is impossible, as God knows!”

“Aye, impossible!” muttered a man near by. “My wife is sick in bed, and there be five children to feed, sir, besides myself. I tell yer, I’m a desperate man, and if things don’t come right I’ll shoot the bosses like I would a dog!”

“Nay, brother, thou shalt not kill,” murmured Lauren, placing a loving hand on the man’s arm. “Remember, my friend, how Jesus suffered and was tortured, and yet He died to save those who persecuted Him. In giving mercy, He received mercy, for to-day He is in paradise!”

“Yer’re right, yer’re right,” muttered the anxious man, his eyes turning to the ground. “But there’s my wife and children,—I can’t forget them.”

“No, nor shall I forget them, my friend. If this strike is not settled by to-night I shall see that your wife and children do not lack for food and necessary aid. Rest assured, as there is a merciful God above you, all shall come right; if not on earth, it will in heaven. Be patient, my brother, as Jesus was.”

“And I, too, shall give all the aid of which I am capable!” cried Mr. Marvin, who was behind Lauren. “I am not a rich man, my friends, but

what I can spare is yours. My door is open to all who wish to come. I, also, am a humble brother among you."

Lauren turned his tear-filled eyes upon his friend.

"Ah, Marvin," he responded, "if all who have homes would only open their doors to the needy how great would be their reward. As it is, they close their doors to all but the rich; and as they do to others, so shall they be done by. When the time of entering heaven comes, the gate may be open to the poor and closed to them. The poor and merciful will be greatest in heaven; and the least in heaven will be the rich and pitiless."

Many other men had approached and were standing near. A murmur of love and approval came from their lips.

"He's a man in a thousand!" muttered one to another. "If there's anyone can help us to-day it's him. He don't say that he's our brother and then go and live in luxury. He works among us, and many's the time he's shared his dinner-pail with me. God bless him, God bless him!"

At this juncture an angry growl came from the men near the entrance of the yard. A glistening carriage, drawn by two silver-decked horses, was slowly approaching, and in it was seated the three owners of the mill. There was stately Mr. Croft and Mr. Middlan, seated side by side, and facing them was Mr. Redford. Each looked angry and impatient, and they were talking quite hurriedly to one another.

The carriage drew up just inside the gate, and

with one wild rush the laborers went forward and surrounded it.

"What is this I see?" shouted Mr. Croft, standing up in the carriage, the costly charm of his watch-chain mockingly flashing the jewels in their faces. "Get to work at once, you men! We cannot afford to let the mill stand idle these days. What is the matter? Out with it."

"We want our regular pay," cried the man who was Lauren's old friend. "That's all we ask. We can't work till we get it, either. We can barely live on that, but we would starve on less."

Mr. Croft sat down, and Mr. Bedford arose.

"My good men," he cried, in his hypocritical politeness, "if you cannot live on less neither can we live if we must pay out all we make. There must be a draw somewhere, or there would not even be a mill in which you could work. Times are hard, as I have told you before. What is a little decrease in the wages to you? As soon as the price of lumber advances we shall advance your wages. As it is, you must take what you can get."

Angry shouts came from the crowd. One strong man lifted a huge piece of lumber and began waving it in the air.

"What we want we shall have, or I shan't answer for your lives. If you don't care whether we starve or not we don't care whether you die or not. Edge to edge we stand, and we're going to have our rights as well as you have yours."

"Right! right!" cried several men.

This time the fleshy Mr. Middlan arose.

"My friends," he said, "we will advance your wages two cents an hour, but we cannot give you as much as you have been getting."

"Might as well say you'll bury two of our wives one hour and two of our children the next," came from a despondent man. He laughed a slow, helpless laugh that went to Lauren's heart. "We can't do it, sir, we can't do it."

"Our regular wages, or none at all!" cried the first speaker, his voice quivering with indignation. "For,—by heavens!—we might as well die to-day as to die to-morrow."

The three gentlemen in the carriage looked very angry as they consulted advice among themselves. Lauren Void was watching them, but he saw that there was no relenting in their actions. They shook their heads and their voices were quickly rising.

Seeing a large post near by, Lauren sprang upon it, towering above the tallest man in the crowd, his pale, beautiful face turned toward the gentlemen sitting so excitedly in the carriage. One of them looked up and saw him. A surprised look crossed his face, and he turned to his friends and spoke a few words to them. They glanced hurriedly toward the man of whom they had heard so much, and then they became silent.

"Gentlemen," cried Lauren, his voice trembling with wistfulness, "I beseech you not to let the fatal temptation of gold assail you now. With you there is wealth, comfort, superfluous luxuries, food, drink! *Here* are wives and children to be fed, and nothing with which to feed them; *here*

are wives and children to clothe, and nothing with which to clothe them. *Here* is sickness and no medicine; suffering and no aid. As you wish God to have mercy on you, show mercy to these, your suffering brethren. No matter how far away death may seem to you now, it is bound to seek you sooner or later; the time *will* come when you will stand before your Master as these men stand before you. As these men plead to you, so will you plead to God. Have mercy on them, or at the judgment day you will not be spared. As you answer these men, so will God deal with you.

“You stand on the edge of a precipice, about to fall into a great cave of everlasting darkness, or to ascend into the light and clasp the hand of God. Will you let the matter of a few silver dollars, which you will never miss, stand in your way to righteousness? Would you not be the first to jeer these men were they to leave their wives and their children to starve? Would you not be the first to call them cowards were they to forsake their homes and labor for themselves alone? Yet without your aid they are powerless to help themselves. Because they toil for you as honest men toil, you reward their loyalty by grinding their wages down to helplessness when you should repay them for their integrity. Can you kneel and thank your God for the blessings that befall you when you know that you are treading these men (your *brethren* in the sight of God) down into a life of worse than poverty? You, who have never known the grasp of hunger, may yet go unfed. You, who have never felt want, may yet be in dire necessity.

You, who have known mercy, may yet ask for it in vain; for it lies in the power of Almighty God to yet place you in the position of these faithful men.

“Jesus Christ, when speaking of the judgment day, said: ‘Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. And if ye do not *this* to my brethren, ye do *it* not to me; and ye shall go away into everlasting punishment.’

“My brothers, show mercy now, lest you some day plead for it in vain. Take your choice: be merciful to these men and thereby gain mercy; or remain pitiless and in death, go into everlasting punishment. We are all brethren, my friends, and there is a God above who will lead you to righteousness, if you will but let Him lead. Let Him lead you now, lest in death He will refuse you aid, as you will have refused mercy unto these faithful men, your brethren!”

With his great heart wrenched in pity, Lauren Void spoke as a desperate mother would plead for her child. As he finished, all the men had turned their faces downward. With tear-dimmed eyes he

stepped from the block and approached the carriage.

"My brothers, have I failed? Do you dare defy God's mercy, and leave these poor men hungered and unclothed?"

"No, you have not failed. As God hears me, these men shall have their regular wages, and more!" Mr. Croft, his face now pale and humbled, grasped Lauren's outstretched hand. "Mr. Void, your words may be simple, but as is in the simplicity of Jesus' own expressions, you can strike the soul. Brethren?—yes, we are all brothers, but I realized it not until you had opened my eyes."

"God bless you!" gasped Lauren, his clasp warm from his heart. "You will never realize all that you have done, my friend, until you stand in judgment before the throne. You have been merciful; therefore mercy shall be shown you." Then he turned to the other two men.

"You also wish this, do you not?"

"Yes, yes," they answered, huskily, their restless eyes traveling over the hundred bowed heads of the men around their carriage.

Lauren's old friend raised his head and looked toward the vehicle.

"We thank you, sirs," he said, simply; "but, above all, we thank that man,"—pointing to Lauren—"who, if ever a man sees the face of God, he will. May God deal with you, sirs, as you have dealt with us."

The three employers bowed.

Mr. Croft slowly arose.

"My friends, return to your work, and rest as-

sured you will receive better wages than you have yet received, and you shall be paid as though nothing had occurred to-day."

The men turned willingly and started toward the mill. They were thankful, not for themselves, but for their wives and children.

Lauren raised his eyes to the employers.

"You have done this unto Jesus," he said, gently. "It remains in your hearts to know whether you would have felt more satisfied had you refused them aid. I leave that to you."

He bowed to them and walked humbly away, his eyes downcast.

Mr. Croft beckoned the driver to start, and they were driven from the yard. As the carriage disappeared along the street Mr. Marvin came toward Lauren and the two men silently clasped hands.

"Lauren, you touched their souls as they have never been touched. Your words seemed coming from Jesus, so true were they. What a great good you have done on this day, my loving brother."

They had neared the mill, and the other men crowded around them.

"Mr. Void," cried one of them, "we can't go to work till we tell you how we feel. We—we don't know how to tell you, but it's in our hearts."

Lauren turned to them, his eyes one glow of love.

"My brethren, it is all for the devotion of God. Thank Him to-night in your prayers, and pray, too, for your employers. Wealth has blinded them to righteousness, but their eyes have been unveiled."

"Ay, ay," they answered, and then they entered the mill.

At the end of an hour the machinery was buzzing as busily and noisily as ever, and every face was brightened with a look of contentment.

Mr. Marvin left and went to his office, but until noon Lauren remained among them and assisted them as much as he could; then he returned to his home.

Mrs. Clendon met him at the door and gently drew him into the room.

"Is all well, my dear boy? Your face seems to tell me so."

"Yes, mother, all is well, thank God. The men are happy and bright, and now they are carrying the good tidings to their anxious wives. I wonder if the employers ever realize how much happiness they can make with a few dollars that they otherwise throw away in selfishness. Ah, it is best to fear God in our wrongs, or we may some day cringe before Him."

"True, my darling, true."

She kissed his heated brow, and then they went in to dinner.

About two o'clock that afternoon he left home and went to the Davert store. Seeing Lila Landon in the glass-front office, he went at once to her. As he entered she turned to him, her pretty face lighted with sympathetic pleasure.

"Oh, how happy you must be, Mr. Void!" she cried, her eyes lifted to his in deepest admiration. "Oh, think how glad those anxious mothers are by this time! How light will seem their burdens,

now they know that justice is done, and their husbands are not toiling for nothing."

"Yes, and how many thankful hearts are lifted in gratitude to God," he said, softly. "Peace be with them—faithful souls!"

"No wonder you love to work for God," she murmured, humbly. "Forgive me, but I used to feel puzzled over the strange beauty of your face. I hope that such a light will some day shine in my own. Do you think it will?"

He bent near her, his eyes gazing into hers.

"It is there already, little one. It is in everyone's face, but the veil of sin or ignorance too often conceals it. When there is beauty in the heart it will glow in the face. You will soon see it in Eugene's face; and, come to speak of him, where is my friend?"

He saw the conscious blush dye her rounded cheeks, but the sight no longer pained him. He felt only happiness that such a sweet girl would some day crown his friend's home.

"That is what I have been longing to tell you," she cried, her little hands clasped on her knee. "Oh, Mr. Void, I nearly cried this morning when I entered the building and found Mr. Davert acting as clerk behind the counter of his own father's store!"

"Ah, he is determined to humble himself as a true Christian should," said Lauren, softly. "He has not forgotten, Miss Landon, that whosoever shall humble himself shall be exalted. He is striving to lead a life which will make him worthy of another, dear. I hope that other will repay him

when he has served her faithfully. He has given his soul to God for her sake. He has sinned, Miss Landon, but he did so in ignorance. Now that he knows right, he is doing it."

"Yes, he is traveling the right path now," she answered, the color coming and going in her pretty cheeks. "He came to me just before noon, Mr. Void, and this is what he said: 'Why, Lila, I never before realized what a trying life this is. Why, I feel like a prisoner chained behind those counters, never to be released excepting to get my meals. After this, each day I will give one clerk a holiday, until each shall have a day of rest, besides Sunday, to look forward to. One clerk will not be missed daily, and think how they will enjoy it! I shall pay them just the same, and I shall be more pleased than any of them.' He looked so delighted, Mr. Void, that I could but sympathize with him, and since he has told the clerks they seem like new beings. Oh, if every employer would only do this little act of kindness, how grand it would be!"

"Yes, Miss Landon—grand for the employer as well as grand for the clerks; for the employer would realize that in showing these little mercies he would be pleasing Christ."

"That reminds me of Miss Lake," cried Lila, suddenly. "I forgot to tell you that upon my taking Laury's baskets to the heiress the other evening she did not pay me. This morning, however, she sent a twenty-dollar gold piece to Laury by a messenger, and with it a little note, saying: 'Forgive my carelessness. Tell your little brother to keep on making the baskets, but not to hurry, as I

shall pay him as often as he wishes.' Wasn't she kind, Mr. Void? And Laury—why he is almost wild with joy. By the way he talks, you would think that every poor boy in Hannibal will share the money before night."

Her blue eyes were full of tears, and she dropped her gaze.

"He wanted to buy something for mother and me, but we told him that there are others in greater need; so he will seek those who need it most."

"God bless his little soul!" murmured Lauren, his voice trembling. "I shall come to visit him tomorrow if I can possibly spare the time. And now I must go. Will you please tell Eugene to come to my rooms to-night, as I have not time to speak with him now?"

"Certainly, Mr. Void, and I know he is anxious to talk to you."

Lauren bade her adieu, and after speaking cheerfully to the clerks he left the store and continued on toward Miss Lake's home.

In answer to his ring a servant opened the door and informed him that Maud had left the city.

"She left a note for you, sir," said the servant, "which she said I was to give to you."

He disappeared and soon returned with the letter, which he handed to Lauren.

As the door was closed, Lauren paused on the steps and tore open the envelope.

"Lauren, do not feel uneasy about me. I have given my soul to Christ, and my future life shall be in His cause."

That was all, but as he stood there her voice seemed to be repeating in his ear:

“Then, Lauren, it would be sinful, would it not, were I to worship an earthly being and not worship God?”

CHAPTER VIII.

—
Trust God; look upward, and open your soul to Him. Seek His aid and all will be well.

* * *

Six months had passed away, and yet Maud Lake had not returned, and no information had been heard about Ethel Flait's whereabouts. Long ago people had ceased talking and wondering about them, and daily events stirred curious minds along other sources.

Eugene Davert had grown to be perfectly happy in the pleasures of aiding less fortunate ones than he, and though his love for Lila Landon had grown deeper and purer each day, he dared not offer his heart to her a second time for fear of her refusing. He realized that to hope was greater happiness than were he to speak and find his anticipations hurled asunder. Lately, with the doctor's permission, he had been taking Laury Landon for a drive every evening after the store was closed, and Lila had often been persuaded into accompanying them. In her happiness at her brother's growing strength she was wonderfully kind to her benefactor, and Eugene could scarcely control the eager words that trembled on his lips as he looked at her pretty, con-

tented face. And yet he waited, humbly watching her day by day as she sat at her desk in the office and he stood behind the counter. And often in the few hours that they could spare they went together to the homes of the sick and the poor and helped and comforted them. Many were the blessings sent after them by prayerful lips of the grateful, and they were doubly happy as they lived in Jesus and served His cause.

With a glow of tenderness in his dark eyes Lauren Void had watched these faithful proceedings, and as he continued in his good work he was happier in the knowledge that many other servants of Christ were helping him to uplift the eyes of the ignorant. In Mr. Marvin he had a faithful friend, and very often the two men were seen together on the street or in each other's home. But through it all Lauren often thought of Maud Lake and wondered where she was. That she was leading a righteous life he never doubted, but he longed to hear from her, to know of and to sympathize with her in merciful acts. He had grown thinner in these last six months, and at times a strange, uncertain look would appear in his eyes when he was alone and in a thoughtful mood.

On this evening he had just finished his late supper, and, at her invitation, was preparing to call on Ethel's mother. Mrs. Trenton had always seemed troubled since her daughter's elopement, and although nearly a year had passed since that event, she had often spoken of it to him.

"Well, mother," he said, as he drew on his coat and gave her a loving kiss, "I very seldom spend

an evening with you, do I? You don't mind it, dear, I hope?"

He looked anxiously into her bright old eyes; but with a gentle smile she laid aside her dish-cloth and, moving nearer, placed her hands upon his shoulders.

"Nay, my boy, as long as I know that you do it for the sake of helping others, I am satisfied. But, my darling, I feel troubled lately when I look into your face. Through all its brightness it seems to hold a lurking shadow. What is it, dearest?"

"If there be a shadow it is an earthly one, mother, for nothing could shadow my pleasure in serving God. I myself can scarcely account for it; and yet at times when I am alone something seems to be beckoning me on—to what, I cannot see."

A frightened cry left her quivering lips.

"Lauren, you do not think that it is death?"

"Death? No, mother, I think not. But even if it be so, worry you not, for death has no fear for me. As I would clasp the hand of a beggar, so should I meet death; and though I should leave you, we would meet in Paradise."

"Ay, my boy, you speak a reproof. I was anxious for but a moment. Death is but a simple parting for those who live in Christ. They say good-bye on earth, to meet in heaven later. Such we, of the many, shall do."

"Yes, mother. And now, dear, adieu until morning. Do not leave the light burning for me. I know the way too well to be guided."

"Ay, you do, you do," she murmured, with deep

meaning. "No hand need guide you to the way of righteousness."

She kissed him and then went to the window and watched him until he was lost in the shadows of the houses along the street.

Lauren walked along with his head partly bent, a thoughtful look in his beautiful eyes.

"The wind seems to be whispering to me," he sighed. "What does it say? It seems to be calling, 'Maud! Maud!' as it rushes along. Why have I thought of her so often all these long six months since she went away so secretly? Has something happened to her, and does she need my aid? Oh, if I but knew, how quickly would I seek her! How strange that her face seems to arise before me when I am alone, and often I think that I hear her voice calling for me. This uncertainty is dreadful! If I only knew whether she is in need of help or not. As it is, I can but place my prayer with God that He will protect her and bring her safely back to us."

He quickened his steps as he neared his destination, and soon he was springing up the porch steps of Mrs. Trenton's comfortable home. She answered his knock, and as she opened the door her face brightened perceptibly.

"You, Lauren? Why, my dear boy, come right in. I was afraid that you wouldn't find time to pay me a visit. Baby has become fretful again, so I got Lila to come over for a few minutes. Come with me into the sitting-room. She is there with the child."

Mrs. Trenton was a thin, nervous woman, her

once pretty features sharpened by her delicate constitution and her dark eyes shadowed with trouble. Just now she held a rattle in one hand and a baby dress was hanging over her other arm.

"I have been trying to dress Master Trenton," she laughed, as she led him along the hall and ushered him into the cosy sitting-room, "but he cried so that I had to let Lila do it. She seems to have an influence over him—don't you, Lila? Here is Mr. Void, dear."

With a face of pleasure, Lila laid the baby in the cradle near her and, arising, gave him her hand.

"You are almost a stranger—to me, at least, Mr. Void," she said, with a faint reproach in her voice. "Why have you avoided me this last week?"

"It was a negligence which I could not avoid," he answered, with a gentle smile. "There has been a great deal of sickness among my poor, and I have had an unusual amount of sleepless nights; therefore I have tried to gain a little slumber during the day. You do not blame me now, do you, little one?"

A soft light crept into her eyes.

"No, Mr. Void. I am so selfish that I feared you did not like me as well as you used to. I feel lonesome if I do not see you once a day, at the least. But come here and say how-d'ye-do to baby. See how he is eyeing you. Dear me, what eyes he has! They seem to look entirely through a person."

With a low laugh, Lauren bent above the cradle and clasped the little, clenched fists in his strong but gentle hand.

"What a tiny mite you are, Master Trenton," he said, kissing the little, smiling face. "So you like to be kissed, do you? Ah, I see, you have been receiving caresses from Miss Landon. Well, my little man, if her kisses are so pleasant now, were you grown they would be doubly sweet."

A deep blush warmed Lila's pretty face.

"You talk as though you have had experience in that direction," she said, teasingly. "But as far as I can recollect you have never kissed me."

Mrs. Trenton had moved to a table at the other side of the room.

He bent toward Lila.

"No, I have never kissed you, dear; yet who knows but I have *longed* to do so?"

A slow paleness drew the brightness from her face, and with wounded eyes she shrank away.

"Forgive me," he whispered, softly. "That time, little one, has long ago passed away. Do not let it make you uneasy now."

Her eyes were not again lifted to his, and once when he looked at her closely he saw that her hands trembled as she tucked the coverlet about the sleeping infant. A moment later he was talking to Mrs. Trenton, but a deep fear was struggling at his heart. Had he, through some terrible blindness, misjudged the affections of this young girl? Had he read her love in the wrong direction, or was he only arousing false hopes? With a will of iron he killed the awakening of his old pain, and in his usual kind way heard of Mrs. Trenton's many little troubles and sympathized with her.

It was a warm night, and one of the low windows

was open, admitting a light gust of wind which fluttered the curtains and brought a healthy glow to the face of the sleeping child. Suddenly a deep silence fell among them, and the baby moaned in his sleep. Lila bent anxiously over the child, but Mrs. Trenton was sitting upright in her chair, her face ghastly, her eyes fastened upon the open window.

Lauren, looking from Lila to her, saw her fright and turned hastily to the window. No sooner had he done so when the curtains parted and someone stepped softly into the room.

A low cry came from Lila's parted lips; then she sprang forward in grateful welcome.

"Ethel!" she cried; then, just for a second, she shrank back a little. "Ethel, what have you there?"

For the new-comer was closely holding a small bundle to her breast. A feeble cry from beneath the thick shawl answered the question for her.

"It is my baby," said Ethel, calmly. "Do you want to see him, Lila? He is a pretty little child, even if he is cold."

Lila gently took the child and hastened to the hearth with him.

"His little hands are really pink, Ethel," she cried, tearfully; "and you must be cold, too. Come to the fire, dear, and get warm."

But Ethel had stopped and was facing her mother, her face pale and haggard.

"Mother," she said, gently, "surely you have forgiven me by this time? See what I am—a mother,

and yet not a mother; a deserted wife, and yet not a wife."

Mrs. Trenton's thin face had flushed with anger.

"Forgiven you, Ethel? No, never! I might love a respectable daughter, but I cannot forgive an outcast. Take your baby and leave my house. I have no pity for such as you. Go, I say! Go!"

With a face of anguish, Ethel gazed dumbly into her mother's eyes.

"Mother, mother, have you no pity in your heart? I am your child, remember, I am your child!" Then in a burst of passion she fell upon her knees before the pitiless woman.

"Mother, mother, you never taught me better. If I have sinned, it is because you did not teach me right from wrong. Why did you not open my eyes before it was too late? You parted from my own dear father, you married Mr. Trenton when you knew that I did not like him, and then you made home so unpleasant for me that I was reckless. Mother, when a mother turns from a child the child is no longer anxious to do right. It is a mother's hand that should guide the child's footsteps along the right pathway; it is a mother's duty to lift the veil of ignorance from her child's eyes; but when a mother fails to do this, what can be expected of the child? Have pity on me, I pray you! I am ill and my baby is cold and hungry. Take us in, mother, take us in!"

Here her weakness mastered her self-control and Ethel sank sobbingly to the floor. Lauren sprang toward her and with the utmost gentleness raised her to the sofa near by, adjusting the pillow com-

fortably beneath her weary head. "Rest assured," he whispered, tenderly. "Trust God; look upward and open your soul to Him. Seek His aid and all will be well."

She heard him, and with a thankful little smile she closed her eyes.

Lauren arose and turned to Mrs. Trenton.

"My friend," he said, sternly, "your daughter is far from well. Show mercy to her, open your door to her, lest when you seek entrance into the house of God you will find the door closed to you. As your daughter has said, she has sinned because of her ignorance. Are you such a heartless mother that you would rather see your child fall into ruin than to tell her right from wrong? There is a commandment, 'Thou shalt not commit adultery,' and as surely as your daughter has broken the holy commandment, *you*, too, have done so. As sure as there lies an illegitimate child in Miss Landon's lap, so there lies an illegitimate child in that cradle; for in the eyes of God both those children were born out of wedlock."

With flashing eyes Mrs. Trenton turned to him.

"How dare you speak such words to me? Did I not marry Mr. Trenton? I have the marriage certificate, sir. Wait. I will bring it to you."

"Nay, Mrs. Trenton, I do not need to see it." He stopped her with a gesture of his hand. His dark eyes had grown wistfully grave. His lips trembled, but he stood firm.

"You have but one husband in the sight of God, Mrs. Trenton, and he is the man from whom you think yourself divorced. No matter how these

earthly laws may divorce you, you are not severed from the bonds that bind a husband and a wife. A husband and wife are chained by the hand of God, and no earthly power can separate them. They are one for life, and can never be made two. Although you call yourself the wife of Mr. Trenton, although you do a wife's duty unto him, you are not his wife. You are the true wife of Ethel's father, and while he lives you can be the wife of no other man. For Jesus said, 'It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you that whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.'"

"I never thought of that; I never did," cried Mrs. Trenton, her face pale with fright. I was ignorant, Lauren; I did not know. Oh, help me, help me! What am I to do?"

"You are to understand that, as you have sinned in ignorance, so has your daughter sinned. My fallen sister, show mercy to your child in her wrongs, as you wish your Saviour to show mercy unto you. Take your child in, as you wish Him to take you in. Exalt yourself not, or you shall be abased; but humble yourself, and you shall be exalted. Forgive, Mrs. Trenton, and forget; and in so doing, your Father will do so unto you."

Lila had been bending over Ethel's weak form, but now she looked up, a soul of pleading in her eyes.

"Come, Mrs. Trenton, and forgive her," she

cried. "Ethel is very ill and cold. She may die, and then you will wish that you had acted differently."

With a wild cry of anguish Mrs. Trenton rushed to the sofa and caught her daughter in her arms.

"Ethel, my poor child, forgive your wayward mother!" she sobbed, pressing her lips to the pale, lined face before her. "You have suffered, darling. How wan and old you look! Oh, forgive me, forgive me!"

Lila had placed the babies side by side in the warm cradle, and as Lauren now took her hand she gave one backward glance and then allowed him to lead her from the room. He helped her on with her jacket, but they did not speak until they had left the house and were alone on the sidewalk.

"I will accompany you home, dear," he said, gently. "Poor Ethel will never sin again, rest assured. Her life will now be one grand repentance. God bless and sustain her in the path of righteousness."

"Ethel sinned in her recklessness," murmured Lila, her eyes filled with tears. "She was never a mean girl. Had she but learnt to look up and think of God as her greatest friend, though even her mother turned from her, she would have trusted on in sweet content and cheerfully dared any misfortune that came her way."

"How well you understand it, little one. Yes, your words are from the heart, for when one lives in Christ she knows that this world is but a struggle of temptation, misfortune and evil, in which we

prove whether we are worthy or unworthy of an entrance to heaven."

Lila moved nearer to him, her eyes upraised.

"Ethel's hu—husband is here in Hannibal," she whispered, sobbingly. "I mean Lester Brown. He deserted her and came here; so she followed him. Mr. Void, won't you try to bring him back to her? Oh, surely you will!"

He clasped her little, fluttering hand.

"Can you doubt me, Lila? It shall be my future duty to draw Lester Brown into Christianity and to cause him to make Ethel Flait his wife."

"I know you will succeed," cried Lila, a glad light in her eyes. "You always do."

"With God's aid, dear—yes."

They had reached her home, and with a gently spoken good-night he left her. As he made his way homeward he was inwardly praying for the two women whom he had raised to repentance.

"I must seek for Lester Brown to-morrow," he thought. "His is another straying soul that needs unveiling. As I have saved Eugene and others, with God's aid I hope to save him."

The moonlight was shining everywhere, and only faint shadows quivered here and there. He raised his eyes heavenward, and a silent prayer was in his humble gaze. Then, with a feeling of peace, he hurried on. He crossed the street and turned along the avenue leading to his home. Scarcely a light was shining along the street, and he thought of the many weary ones wrapped in the rest of slumber.

"God bless them," he murmured, as he gently

unlatched the gate and walked along the short path leading to the door. He leaped lightly up the steps and was about to cross the porch when he stopped suddenly, his eyes filled with surprise.

Clearly in the moonlight he saw a woman's motionless figure lying upon the smooth surface before him. With a low cry he sprang toward her, and, lifting the figure in his strong arms, he turned the white face to the moonlight.

"Maud!" he cried, and even though he saw that she was thinly clad and unconscious, a strange thrill of pleasure quivered through his heart.

"My Maud," he murmured, "home at last. Thank God for your safe return!"

His arms tightened around her as her head fell against his breast, and, softly opening the door, he carried her to the sitting-room and placed her in a chair before the hearth. Several coals were still blazing near the fender, and he stirred them up, putting more wood upon them. The flames crept up, ignited, and lighted the dark room. Lauren turned to the lamp and lighted the wick; then he took a bottle of cologne from the mantel and gently bathed Maud's marble-white brow.

"Entirely exhausted," he murmured, as he gazed into her pale, impenetrable face. "What has the poor child been doing to weary herself like this?"

He knelt before her and began chafing her cold hands. His touch, though gentle, seemed to arouse her. She stirred uneasily, and with a faint sigh she opened her eyes and looked dreamily into his.

"Lauren," she murmured, a light flush tinting her cheeks. "You here?"

"Yes, Maud, my dear friend," he cried, drawing nearer to her. "You are not ill, I hope? I found you lying on the porch."

"No, I am only tired. I was sitting up and waiting for you, but my weakness overmastered me. I am a poor girl now, Lauren. I have given nearly all my earthly possessions to the poor. I want to tell you about it when I am stronger. I am so happy, even if I am tired! Oh, those grateful faces shine upon me everywhere! It is never dark for me any more—never dark!"

"God bless you, Maud!" he cried, reverently. "You are indeed with Christ. And now that you are weary, God will give you rest. I shall call mother and let her attend to you. Our home is yours, Maud, as well as the home of any wandering sister. Be peaceful, for God is peace."

He clasped her hand warmly as he knelt there, and before he had time to arise the door opened and Mrs. Clendon entered the room.

"I thought I heard voices, dear," she said, gently, "and so I came down. Who is it? Let me help you, my boy."

"It is Maud Lake, mother, and the poor child is terribly exhausted. Get her to bed as soon as possible, as sleep will do her more good than anything else."

Mrs. Clendon stepped to Maud's side and kissed the girl's white face.

"Yes, Lauren, I will care for her, gladly. Poor

child, poor child! I will make her a cup of hot tea, and then she shall retire."

The loving old woman hurried to the kitchen to fulfill her mission, and with a little, contented sigh Maud bent toward Lauren.

"You are glad to see me, Lauren?"—anxiously.

"Oh, Maud, so glad!" he cried, pressing her hand to his flushed cheek. "I have been longing to have you near again."

"Then I am satisfied," she murmured, her eyes closing. "God is always good—always."

And as he knelt there a great peace stole into Lauren's heart and the glow of tenderness deepened in his eyes. The uncertain light was gone, and he understood what had been haunting him for six long months.

CHAPTER IX.

In life we may learn to forget our badness, but in death it rises like a mountain before us, and the more we try to get from it the greater it grows, until it covers us.

* * *

"Well, mother," said Lauren Void the next morning when he came downstairs to breakfast, "how is your patient? Doing well, I hope?"

"Yes, dear, she is sleeping like a sheltered lamb, poor child. She was surely very weary, for she has not awakened since she retired. She will feel like a new being when she arises and takes a cup of strong tea."

He laughed as he kissed her soft, wrinkled cheek.

"Tea is your motto for every ill, mother," he answered, lovingly. "I hope that it will always fulfill your anticipation of its curative powers. But as a rule it generally does. Are we to have breakfast now, or wait for Miss Lake?"

"No, dear, sit down at once. I see you are anxious to be off, and the child may not awaken for several hours yet. What is your mission to-day, dear, that you are up so early to perform it?"

A wistful light crept into his eyes as he met her loving gaze.

"Ethel Flait returned last night with her little

child, mother. Mrs. Trenton was terribly relentless, and I had to use very plain language to open her eyes to her own misguidance. However, it is all settled now, thank God, and Lester Brown is the only wayward brother with whom I have to deal to-day. If it is lies within my power to do so, I shall urge him, through the love and fear of God, to make Ethel Flait his wife. But as I do not know his exact whereabouts, I am anxious to search for him."

"He used to stay at the Barnum House, didn't he, dear?"

"Yes, mother, and I shall go there first to inquire for him. If he is not there, I may have to search for him all day long, so I feel that I should begin as early as possible."

"You are quite right, dear, and since the breakfast is all ready, you need not wait."

They sat down to the table and for several moments ate in silence.

Mrs. Clendon cast several keen glances at his half-averted face, and as she did so a glow of satisfaction warmed her own countenance.

"Lauren, you look brighter this morning than I have seen you look for a long time."

"I feel brighter, mother; perhaps that is why. Some people say that the face is a mirror to the heart, and that we should avoid sour countenances. But I suppose the face mirrors the sweetness of the heart also. I had a long and patient pleading with Maud to win her soul to Christ, and I have been anxious to hear of her good work and of her. When I return I hope that she will be able to tell

me of her righteous acts. Maud has a deep, emotional soul, and when she sets her heart onto doing anything she is loyal unto death to the cause. By her evident exhaustion last night, she has not only given her money to the poor but has used her physical strength for them. That is my loyal Maud: just as I knew she would be—brave and true in her duty to Christ.”

“She is much like Lila Landon, is she not, dear?”

“In her Christian faith she is, mother, but not in other ways. Where Lila is slow to think and act, Maud is impulsive, passionate. Where Lila would wait obediently to be guided, Maud would rush forth impetuously.”

“Then,” said Mrs. Clendon, gently, “I suppose where Lila would love in a quiet, conscious way, Maud’s love would be secret and more like worship.”

For a second his eyelids quivered.

“Yes, mother.”

Before he arose to go he said to her:

“If Maud comes downstairs, mother, get her to sit in my den by the window. There is a little mocking-bird that comes every morning to sing among the passion flowers, and he will make friends with her if she but tosses him a few bread crumbs.”

“All right, dear; that will be a lovely place for her to rest, and the pretty view of the flower garden will brighten the scene.”

He thanked her and, kissing her lovingly, as usual, he started on his way.

The Barnum House was a sort of hotel where lodging and board could be secured at a moderate cost, and Lester Brown, being a poor man, dependent on daily labor for a livelihood, had resided there before his elopement with Ethel Flait. In answer to Lauren's ring, the landlady, a fleshy, kind-faced woman, opened the door. Thinking that perhaps Brown had changed his name so that no one could trace him, he said:

"Good-morning, madam. Will you please inform me if a young man of about twenty-eight, dark-complexioned, and with a slight scar on his left brow, is staying here? He is quite tall, and a great whistler."

As he mentioned the whistling her face brightened with understanding and she smiled.

"Lester Brown, you mean, sir? Yes, sir, he is here in his room now. It's No. 14, on the first landing, just to your right. Come right in, sir; there's the stairway."

After thanking her, Lauren sprang up the stairs and, finding room 14, knocked upon the door.

"Who is there?" a gruff voice asked, and someone within arose, coming hurriedly toward the door.

"A friend, Lester. Don't you know my voice? Lauren Void, my brother, who wishes to speak a few words to you."

There was a smothered exclamation, and the footsteps were retraced.

"Come in, then; the door's not locked."

Lauren opened the door and entered the room, seeing at a glance that Brown was evidently very

depressed in spirits. The young man was sitting backward in his chair, his hands folded over the back of it, his chin resting upon them. In his eyes was an angry, unfriendly look which spoke as clearly as these words: "Come on and preach all you want; you needn't think you're going to touch my heart." Nevertheless his face flushed as he met Lauren's keen, sympathetic gaze.

"I am glad to see you looking so well, Lester, if you *are* a little moody," he said, brightly. "Out of work, aren't you?"

Brown looked puzzled. Was this the way the lecture was to be dealt to him?

"Yes, I am," he answered, more politely. "I have been searching for a position for the last week and yet I have been very unsuccessful. I am going to start out again to-day."

"You need not," said Lauren. "Mr. Croft is anxious to secure a reliable man to look after the machinery downstairs in the lumber mill, and I think you're the very man to fill the place. You are handy about machinery, aren't you?"

"Handy!" exclaimed Brown. "I can do anything with it. If I wasn't so dog-gone poor, I might patent some splendid invention. Are the wages good?"

"Very fair; fifty dollars a month to start on, with an increase if industry is shown."

Brown's eyes flashed with pleasure.

"Why, that is splendid!" he cried. "More than I ever hoped to earn. I say, Void, you're awfully kind to help me in this way. This"—tossing a

silver dollar to the floor—"is the last show I've got."

Lauren scarcely noticed his friend's act.

"Fifty dollars a month is enough with which any man can support a wife and family," he said, gently. "I know dozens of men who are doing so on less than that. Lester, I suppose you have heard of poor Mrs. Blunt, whom I saved from ruin, and who is now living in the little white cottage at Grant's corner? Well, she is very lonesome there alone, and if you and your wife would care to live with her, she would be delighted. She has more sewing than she can do lately, and Ethel could help her a great deal. It would be a lovely home for all of you, and Mrs. Blunt could help Ethel in attending the baby and in the housework."

Brown's face had turned very pale.

"Baby!" he muttered. "Whose baby?"

"Yours and Ethel's," answered Lauren. Then his dark eyes began to flash. "Lester Brown, do you mean to say——"

Brown interrupted him with a dry, harsh laugh.

"Yes, I mean to say that I didn't know that Ethel had a child. I haven't seen her since I deserted her, nearly four months ago. The child is nothing to me."

"No, not on earth, but at the judgment day you will have to answer for its being." Lauren's voice had grown calm and grave. "Lester Brown, even though the world may slander Ethel Flait in her downfall, and at the same time let you go in peace, your sin is even greater than your victim's. Man was given strength and endurance so that he could

be a true protector and example to woman, the weaker and better work of God. That you have done wrong you cannot deny, for by the expression of your face I can see that your conscience is pricking you and you are trying to deaden it. But, my friend, although you may deaden it on earth, your sin is marked in heaven, and when the day comes on which you must answer for your sins, this one will be with the others. In life we may learn to forget our badness, but in death it rises like a mountain before us, and the more we try to get from it the greater it grows, until it covers us. Then we realize, when it is too late, how much better we could have done; and as we long to retract harsh words after a loved one is gone, so we then long to return to life and to make our record cleaner. But unless you repent and do better in life, death will chain you forever to your sins. And, bound thus, you must stand up for your judgment. My brother, discard these sins that blacken your soul; repent and be pure. I am speaking only for your good. I am willing, *anxious* to do all in my power to make your future life a good and happy one.

“What greater blessing in life could any man want, when he has a loving wife and a little child? Ethel is a sweet, womanly girl, and the child is as innocent and lovable as any little one. Instead of being alone and restless in the world, Lester, you can be a happy husband, with a comfortable home, a loving wife, and a profitable income. And through it all you may claim me as your dearest friend. I shall see that you never lack for work,

and in trouble I will stand beside you as I stand beside my other brethren."

The wistful voice quivered and paused. Lauren arose and hesitatingly stretched out his hand.

"Even if you will not repent, Lester, let us be friends. I am willing to help you and Ethel apart, if I cannot help you together. My effort is not only to get you to return to Ethel; I am just as anxious to save you from the awful darkness that surrounds the pitiless in death. So come, Lester, let us be friends."

There was a long pause. Brown had bowed his head upon his hands, and his face could not be seen. A strong breath heaved his shoulders, and then he suddenly arose. He grasped Lauren's hand and held it as a drowning man clutches a rope.

"Void, you are the best fellow I ever met." There were tears very near the surface of Brown's eyes. "Are you sure, quite sure, that Ethel will forgive me? Do you think that were I to go to her and ask her pardon that she would listen to me, that she would repent with me and become my lawful wife?"

A glad tenderness leaped into Lauren's face.

"God bless you, my brother, God bless you! She is as ready to forgive you as you are to ask her forgiveness. Go to her, my friend, and tell her all. When you have settled this little matter, go to Reverend Menson's home and be married. Then if you do not feel satisfied that you have done that which is best, you may deal with me as you like. I place myself at your mercy."

Brown's face had grown decidedly pale and grateful.

"How shall I ever thank you, Lauren? You have made a new man out of me. I was so down-hearted when you arrived that I was contemplating suicide. Think of the awful darkness that I should have taken with me!" He shuddered in horrified emotion. "My God, I am glad that you have saved me from myself! With Ethel and our little child with me I shall make my life the best of which I am capable. Lauren, you will help me? You will see that I do not fall?"

"Ay, brother, forever. I shall guide you until you are so safe in Christ that you will be capable of guiding others. Rest assured, my friend, that after once repenting it is as easy to repent again as when you sin and find it easy to sin again. But in sin you live in darkness; in righteousness you find the light. Go now, my friend, and seek Ethel. Make her your wife as soon as possible, and remember that Mrs. Blunt will have the house ready for you at any time you care to come. It is all nicely furnished, with plenty of room for your little family. You will have no trouble with Mrs. Blunt; she is a meek Christian, and does all in her power to make others happy. She will teach Ethel to rear your child in the Christian faith, and you will find divine peace in your household. Now, go and make Ethel happy. Poor girl, she has known sorrow enough, God knows."

"I shall try to make her life all the brighter for the shadow that I have cast over it," cried Brown.

"In my selfish sinning I did not think of her at all. Yes, I shall go to her at once."

He caught up his hat, and Lauren went with him as far as the sidewalk; there they clasped hands and parted.

A prayer of silent gratitude was in Lauren Void's heart as he made his way homeward. How Ethel Flait's tired, white face would brighten when she knew all! A smile of sympathy curved his lips as he thought of it, and the light of contentment deepened in his eyes. Then, thinking of Maud, he hurried on and was soon approaching Mrs. Clendon's home.

He hastened through the gate, along the walk, and into the sitting-room. Laying aside his hat, he glanced through the open door toward his den. There sat Maud before the window as he had directed; but his loving mother had placed a table before her, and the two were talking gaily over their tea.

With a face of pleasure he stepped forward and joined them.

"Maud, you look like a different girl," he said, as he gazed lovingly into her flushed face. "Why, I declare, I shall soon begin to think that mother put something mysterious into that tea. It seems to have a wonderful vigor, truly."

Mrs. Clendon was gayer than she had been for years; her old, kind face was wreathed in smiles.

"It is so nice to have someone with me while you are gone, darling," she said, as she kissed him. "And Maud seems to suit me better than anyone else. I wish——"

But here she paused with a little sigh, and Maud quickly averted her flushed face from Lauren's intent gaze. He had stopped beside her chair, his hand resting upon the back of it.

"You wish that you could engage Maud as a companion, mother, do you mean?" he asked, teasingly. "Well, perhaps you can; at least, I *hope* so. Nothing could please me better than to leave her with you when I am gone. You will remain for a few weeks anyway, won't you Maud?"

She looked up and met his gaze, and something that she read there caused her to smile as she answered:

"Yes, Lauren, if you and Mrs. Clendon wish it so much. I can rest and regain my strength so much quicker here. I feel so much as though Jesus had led me here. There is nothing but peace everywhere."

"There is naught but peace where Lauren lives," said Mrs. Clendon, gently; "and I'm going to prove to you how glad I am to have you stay with us, dear. Now, I shall take these tea-things away, and you and Lauren can have a talk together. He is anxious to know all that you have done."

The good old woman disappeared with the tray, and, moving aside the table, Lauren sank upon a hassock at Maud's feet.

"Now, tell me all about it, Maud," he murmured, half turning and drawing one of her trembling hands in his. "You have been working for the poor, I know."

"Yes, Lauren, I went to St. Louis; and, oh, the poor and suffering ones that I found there! Why,

I never realized how much good a little money can buy, if you but use it in the right way. How those poor men and women thanked me when I brought them food or stood beside the bed of a sick child and helped them nurse the little one! But, Lauren, one scene I shall never forget—never. It haunts me many times a day, and I wonder and wonder how rich people can live content in throwing away their wealth in utter selfishness. In the first home to which I went a little girl of about ten lay dying. I called in a doctor, but he said that the fever had gained such headway that it could not be checked. I gave all the earthly aid I could, but the child slowly sank into unconsciousness, while with white, set faces the mother and father knelt beside the cot.

“Soon the child’s breath ceased, and with a little cry of delight she had entered the portals of heaven. With tears of anguish in her eyes the haggard mother turned to me. ‘See,’ she cried, ‘she’s happy at last. Her poor old mother was forgotten when she saw heaven. God knows that I gave her all the care I could; but I couldn’t give her peace like that. She’s the fourth one that’s gone, miss, and she never said good-bye to me.’ Then the poor woman fell senseless upon the bed beside the child, and the broken-hearted husband sobbed aloud. Oh, Lauren, I am crying! I can’t help it. The tears come rolling down my cheeks whenever I think of it. Why don’t the rich give a little of their money to aid the poor? Why don’t they humble themselves as Jesus did, and go among the needy and feed and clothe them? If they are

unhappy in their lives of luxury, they would never be unhappy after once doing as I have done. I, too, was rich and selfish and unhappy. Now I am poor, and never did I dream that I would realize such peace as I feel now.

"When I was among those poor, helpless beings I felt as though Jesus was walking by my side and blessing me. Oh, the thought was exquisite! I felt as though I was floating straight to God. I am longing to repeat it; I will, as soon as I get strong again. I lived among them day after day, night after night, until my strength gave way; then, finding that I was penniless, I returned. I shall sell my grand old home, and keep just enough of it to live on; the remainder I shall have for those poor, loyal souls. Oh, Lauren, I am so happy!"

"Happy! Ah, Maud, my little friend, you need not tell me that. If ever a face revealed the feelings of a heart, yours does. Child, child, I never dreamed of what I should gain when I was striving to win your soul to Christ. See how God has repaid me for my efforts. Oh, faithful Saviour, loving Father!"

He drew a deep, reverent breath.

"Maud, I have uplifted another ignorant soul. I have sent Lester to Ethel."

"You succeeded, Lauren? Oh, how splendid! Mrs. Clendon told me of your mission; and, oh, how thankful Ethel will be! Lauren, how many people owe their good lives to you!"

He had raised his beautiful face and was looking up at her.

"Maud," he whispered, "they will be very happy now."

She understood his meaning.

"Very happy," she murmured. But a strange, darting pain in her eyes checked the eager words on his lips.

And although he bowed his head in sympathy, a look of unutterable happiness had appeared in his face.

CHAPTER X.

—

Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.

* * *

"Oh, Ethel, I am so glad to see you happy, dear!" Lila Landon's face glowed with pleasure as she clasped her friend's hands. "How kind Mr. Void has been to all of us! Was there ever a more magnanimous being than he? And how your eyes shine, dear—just as they used to do!"

"Yes, Lila, I am so contented that I long to make others happy, so that I may feel worthy of my own good fortune. When Lester came to me day before yesterday and asked my forgiveness I could hardly answer him, so deep was my grateful astonishment. Then I thought of Mr. Void, and I realized what he had done for us. Oh, Lila, I shall mention him in every prayer I offer to God. Think what my life would have been had he not come to my aid!"

The speaker shuddered, and Lila's eyes shone with sympathy.

They were sitting in the parlor of the little cottage where Mrs. Blunt had been living for several months. After their marriage Ethel and her husband had come here to reside, and a happier little household could not be found in Hannibal. Les-

ter was away to his work at the lumber mill, but Mrs. Blunt was sitting near with a smiling infant on her lap, her old face expressing the keenest pleasure and motherly love as she hummed to the child.

She looked up as the two girls paused in their conversation.

"Lauren Void has many a friend in this world," she said, softly. "But, dears, his greatest friend is Jesus Christ. If we let Jesus lead us as He has led Mr. Void, we need not fear of our ever doing wrong. Ethel, we must teach this little youngster to understand the right way."

"Yes, yes, indeed," cried Ethel, eagerly. "Just as soon as he can talk. I wonder if there is some sort of a Mellin's Food or something that would make his voice come quicker?"

Lila and Mrs. Blunt laughed merrily, and Ethel looked at them with earnest eyes, wondering where they had found any joke.

"You are a regular greenhorn, Ethel," answered Lila, tenderly. "And now that I have seen you so happy and contented, I must go home at once. It is getting late, and mamma will be looking for me."

"I suppose Mr. Davert has not returned from his business trip, has he, Lila?"

"No. He went away so suddenly yesterday that he did not take time to tell us when he would come back."

Lila had stepped before the mirror and was pinning on her hat.

Ethel went into the next room and reappeared with a paper in her hand.

"Lila," she whispered, "just read this in the local newspaper. You'll suspect who did it."

Lila turned with inquiring eyes and began to read the column indicated:

"Mr. Lester Brown, who has been in Hannibal for several months, was joined by his wife and child to-day, who came from Ely, where they had been residing. Mr. Brown has secured a responsible position at the Croft, Middlan & Redford lumber mill. The young couple are at home to their friends at — First street."

"Oh, Ethel," cried Lila, the tears rushing to her eyes, "how kind, how noble of him! With so many stray brethren to look after, I wonder how he always manages to be so thoughtful."

"It is his generous heart, God bless him!" murmured Ethel, her cheek pressed against the paper. "Oh, Lila, when I showed it to Lester this morning he couldn't say a word. He left the breakfast table and went off alone. I understood how he felt, but, being a woman, I remained where I was and cried until Mrs. Blunt interposed and told me I had shed enough tears to drown the baby."

"And so she had, hadn't she, darling?" said Mrs. Blunt, kissing the baby's little clenched fist. There was a soft gurgle in the affirmative, and then Lila kissed him, too.

"Now I must really go," she laughed, "but don't think that I'm not coming again. I fear I'll be here more than twice a day, sometimes. So good-bye, Ethel; good-bye, Mrs. Blunt; and bye-bye, baby!"

And with her usual quick way, Lila hastened along the hall and was out upon the sidewalk before Ethel could interpose. She nodded to Ethel as the latter stood in the hall doorway and then she hurried on toward her home.

She was walking with her head thoughtfully bent, and therefore did not see the manly form that was racing after her.

"Lila, how fast you are going," called Eugene Davert. "Aren't you going to let me overtake you so that you may tell me how glad you are to see me?"

With deeply flushed cheeks, she paused and turned about, her hand outstretched. He reached her side and warmly clasped the little hand.

"My, how you walk!" he cried, his eyes all admiration as he looked into her pretty face. "Lila, I have been away scarcely a day, and yet the time has seemed years." He bent his handsome head toward her as they walked along. "Darling, tell me that you are glad to see me."

It was the first time that he had ever used a word of endearment toward her, although his eyes had been speaking "volumes" for the last six months.

She looked up, and he saw something in her eyes that caused his heart to flutter with suppressed joy.

"I am very, very glad to see you, Eugene. I, too, have missed you."

A flush of pleasure arose to his white forehead.

"Lila, I went away to St. Louis to have an understanding with my father. I told him that I was working as clerk in his store and that, since I have

managed to earn my livelihood thus, I am fully determined to marry a poor girl, if she will have me. To my great surprise, he didn't seem angry at all, but just said: 'Your words don't surprise me at all, Eugene. I raked my own father over the coals by marrying a penniless girl. That was all a joke about my threatening to disinherit you. I hoped to keep you straight by so doing; but, by all means, marry the girl; it's time you were settling down.' Now, Lila, wasn't he kind?"

"Very." Her face had grown pale and her eyes were downcast.

He turned toward her, his heart harassed with conflicting emotions.

"Lila, my darling sweetheart, it is useless to tell you of my love. Dearest, tell me, is there any hope that I may win your promise to become my wife? Lila, for Heaven's sake, do not let my shameful past come between us. You know, as God knows, that I am no longer what I was then! I have given my soul to Christ and my future lies in His hands."

She raised her eyes to his and he read a deep joy therein.

"Of course there is hope, Eugene, for you have taught me to return your love. Once I lost all respect for you, but now I gladly promise to be your wife."

"Lila, my darling, I hardly dared hope this. Thank you, dearest, thank you! Oh, why should we be on the street at this moment?"

The full meaning of his last sentence dawned

upon her, and she laughed aloud, her pretty cheeks flushing hotly.

"There will be plenty of time for kisses, Eugene, I assure you; and if some couples would but keep their caresses until after marriage they would be much happier!"

"You are right, dearest, but you mustn't be too retentive in that direction, for, really, I have been dreaming of kissing you for a long, long time!"

She met his teasing gaze, and they both laughed aloud. They had reached her home and he opened the gate for her as they passed through.

Laury was sitting in a large armchair beneath the chestnut tree, a book in his eager hands, from which he was reading to his mother, who stood beside him. As she looked up and saw the two approaching faces she called gaily:

"What have you done, you naughty children? Why, I declare, Laury, don't they look as though they have been into mischief!"

Laury carefully placed his book-mark and laid the book across his knee. Then, with a happy face, he looked up as Lila and Eugene paused before him.

"Well, don't they, though!" he cried. "Just like two escaped lunatics! So you have returned, Eugene? Couldn't you manage to get home first before you hunted up Lila?"

"No, I couldn't!" laughed Davert. "And look here, Laury, Lila has given me permission to become your brother-in-law; what do you think of that?"

With a little cry of pleasure, Laury looked at Mrs. Landon.

"Oh, isn't that jolly, mother? Didn't I tell you so? You see,"—turning toward Lila—"mother and I have been expecting this for the last month or so. You always blushed so when we mentioned Eugene that it aroused our suspicions; and when I saw him looking at you as though he longed to eat you up, I knew something was wrong, so I told mother, and she said—as a joke, you know,—that anyone but a blind person could see that you two loved each other."

"Say, I never knew before what a naughty boy you are!" laughed Eugene, as he kissed Laury's smiling lips. "And you, Mrs. Landon—why, you quite astonish me with your foresight. But"—pleadingly—"you are willing to give Lila to me, are you not? Her home shall be yours and Laury's, and we shall all be together. Surely you do not object to me now?"

"No, Eugene, I am well pleased to claim you as my future son. I realize how great is the reward when a mother teaches her daughter to pursue the path of righteousness. It has also saved you from sin, my boy. Thank God that all has turned out so well!" She took his proffered hand and clasped it warmly; then she turned to Lila and kissed her daughter's pretty, flushed face.

"I am happy for your sake, dear," she murmured gently.

"And I am happy for everybody's sake!" cried Laury. "But, Eugene, you have just returned, haven't you? Don't you want some supper?"

"No, thank you, Laury. I shall return to my home now and get Trank to serve my lonely meal. I have some business affairs to look after, too. So I shall bid you adieu until morning." His hand closed over Lila's.

"You couldn't possibly come into the house for a moment or two, could you, dear?"

"No, Eugene, there is no hope of my doing so. Until you are well out of sight I must stand beneath the friendly branches of this tree!"

Although she was teasing, the love-light in her upraised eyes filled his heart with exquisite pleasure; and while Mrs. Landon and Laury laughed gayly, he raised his hat and started toward the gate. He turned as he gained the sidewalk and called:

"Don't be uneasy about my returning to-night. But I won't deny about my coming pretty early in the morning, so look out for me, Laury, and if no one is awake you must come down and let me in."

"All right," laughed Laury, tossing his book in the air. "And then I suppose when you and Lila get together there might as well not be a Laury, for all you'll remember."

Lila placed a loving hand over Laury's smiling lips and Mrs. Landon laughed softly. Eugene made a playful grimace at the young boy and then hurried on along the street.

He was crossing to Broadway when he saw Lauren Void just ahead of him. With a few quick steps he overtook his friend and walked by his side.

With a look of pleasure, Lauren turned to him.

"Eugene! Why, I am surprised as well as delighted! You have returned sooner than I ex-

pected. There must be some wonderful attraction in Hannibal to draw you back like this."

"I declare," laughed Eugene, "everybody seems to be in for teasing me to-night. Lauren, I am one of the happiest men in the world, really I am. Can you guess why?"

"Guess?" Lauren's smile was very gentle. "There is nothing to guess. You might say do I know, for I think I do. Has sweet little Lila given her heart to you?"

"She has, Lauren, and even in my great happiness I feel that I am not worthy of her. And, my dear friend, forgive me for asking it, but I have often wondered if you loved Lila. Tell me, have you any wish to win her?"

"In the dim past, Eugene, I once thought of winning her love; now that thought is dead and buried. I am happy in your happiness, my friend, for God knows best, and He points a way for everything, if we will but rightly heed and comprehend. I know that your future life will be a joyous one, Eugene; but never let your worldly gains come between yourself and Christ."

"Lauren, rest assured on that point. I have tasted only too well the glittering waste of an aimless life. Lauren, if I can be but half as noble and true as you are, I shall be satisfied; but it will keep me striving all my life to attain even that height."

"You should not say those words, Eugene. I am no better than any of my brethren who live in Christ, and you must not think so. Even Jesus said that no one was perfect, excepting His Father

in heaven. When we make our lives the best that is possible we can do no more; but when we come to do this we find that it fills our soul with a contentment that nothing else in life can fill."

"How truly you speak, Lauren. In the past, when I was letting temptation assail me, something arose before my eyes and has haunted me ever since; I think it will be in my memory when I die. It was only a vacant lot, with a pile of débris, Lauren, but as I looked at it I came to realize that all sinful people will be cast away like that waste and are spotting the earth as the débris spotted the peacefulness of that place. It was a lesson from God; for was it not His own handiwork?"

"God bless you, Eugene," murmured Lauren, with a loving gaze. "Teach this lesson to others, as it has taught you, and you will then find the memory of it a pleasant one."

"I have done so, Lauren, and I have seen that others feel it as I did then. But here we are at the corner, so I must say good-night. Come to me to-morrow, Lauren, and let us talk together."

"I will, thank you, Eugene. Good-night, and God bless your good work."

They clasped hands, and, with loving looks into each other's eyes, parted for the night.

"Lila is happy now," thought Lauren, as he approached his own home. "How delighted Laury will be, and I know that Mrs. Landon will be pleased. I shall visit them to-morrow and get Mrs. Landon to come in the afternoon to talk to Maud."

As he thought of his own special charge, his steps quickened and he soon reached the house. As he entered the sitting-room, he playfully stopped Mrs. Clendon and kissed her before she could get through the kitchen door with her dishes.

"That's my boy all over again," she smiled, as she gazed lovingly at him. "Never forgets his old mother, whether he is apt to break all the dishes or not."

He took the platter from her and carried it to the table.

"May I help you in any way, mother?"

"No, dear; I am really tired of sitting down, and there is such a little to do. You go in to Maud, dear, and talk to her. Poor child, she does not seem to be gaining strength very rapidly, although she's as cheerful as anybody."

Very willingly, Lauren went from the room and searched for Maud. He found her sitting in his den, her elbows resting on the window-sill and her face buried in her hands. She did not hear him coming, and, with a contented sigh, he sat down on the stool close beside her.

Quickly she looked up as his hand crept over her lap and sought her own.

"Maud, I hope you are not dreaming of some other man," he said, softly. "Are you?"

"No," she answered, dreamily. "I was thinking of the time when I first gave my life to Christ. You came in so easily, Lauren, that you did not awaken me. I was thinking of all the happiness my money has caused; when, if I had never been unveiled from ignorance, my wealth would still

be used in selfish wants, and those poor, suffering beings would yet be unaided. Oh, I am so glad that you talked so patiently to me in those old days, Lauren. Even in my obstinacy, I admired your patient endurance. Dear friend"—her white fingers were now caressing the glossy curls that rested on his brow—"I have much to thank you for. You have made me happy, whereas I would be a selfish, discontented woman."

He moved closer to her, her other hand still imprisoned in his.

"Maud, since I have made you so happy, will you not return the favor and complete my own joy? Maud, darling, will you give yourself to me? Will you be my wife, a dear, helpful companion that I need?"

Her face had grown deathly pale, and for a moment her white hand grew cold and trembled in his clasp.

"Lauren, do you mean that you love me?" she whispered, as though her breath was choking her.

"Love you, Maud? I only hope, dear, that you love me half as well! Do you?"

He had partly raised himself and his arms were closing about her slender waist. "Do you, Maud?"

He had drawn her flushed face against his own.

"Do I? Oh, Lauren, if you but knew how I have fought against my absorbing worship for you! Do you remember that night when you told me that, through sorrow, I should find God? Little did you know, dear, how true were your words. As you spoke to me I realized that your soul was with Christ, and that only when I was there also could

I be more than a friend to you. Then, as I saw that you were lost to me, your words lured me to God, and with one rush of love I sought consolation from my Saviour. Ah! and He comforted me, Lauren; He has consoled me more than I dared ever hope!"

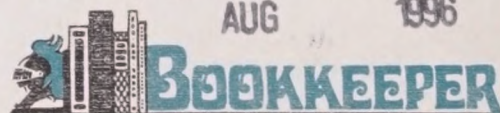
"Then, my darling Maud, thus shall we live, hand in hand, our souls together in Christ." His lips pressed hers, and he felt the thrill that passed over her. "Do you know what has made my life so humble and contented, Maud? I will tell you. In my early youth I was a proud, imperious child. One day I did something wrong, and my Christ-loving mother drew me to her lap and taught these words to me: 'When the disciples asked Jesus, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus called a child unto Him and set him in the midst of them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' "

THE END.

JAN 27 1904

Deacidified using the Bookkeeper process.
Neutralizing Agent: Magnesium Oxide
Treatment Date:

AUG 1996



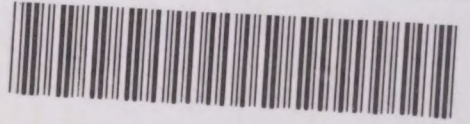
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